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BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

BY
J. D. SYMON

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTORY	ix
I	" BYRON, THE TEMPEST-BORN "	1
II	NEW LIGHT ON MRS. BYRON'S TROUBLES	11
m	THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH	28
IV	EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS	49
V	NEW SURROUNDINGS	69
VI	THE HARROW BOY	78
VII	THE COMING OF THE POET	106
VIII	THE PILGRIM	125
IX	THE BYRONIC HERO	142
X	THE AWAKENING TO FAME	158
XI	THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE	171
XII	THE INCOMPATD3LES	192
XIII	THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME	207
XIV	THE SCOT IN BYRON	228
XV	BYRON IN HIS BURLESQUE EPIC	244
XVI	THE HELLENIC ENTHUSIASM	260
XVII	THE LAST ADVENTURE	275
	APPENDIX	298

INTRODUCTORY

THE vista of a single century may not be long enough to throw any man's life and work into absolute perspective, but if both are still defying oblivion at the end of a hundred years, there is at least a strong probability that by that time a critical estimate *is* taking shape for finality. Misunderstandings and misconceptions are clearing away; the deliberate misrepresentations of enmity or stupidity have been corrected by fresh evidence or have merely faded out with the unsympathetic generation that put them forward; and what is excellent in the work itself has risen clear of what is less excellent, or, it may be, actually worthless. The inferior parts are admitted and set aside and can no longer blur the estimate of the better. The lapse of a century has at any rate made possible a canon of criticism. This rule is not invariable, nor can it be said to depend on any definite time-limit. The eighteenth century opinion of Shakespeare, for example, proves that even at a distance of two hundred years critical judgment may stray into extraordinary new misconceptions, arising from the idiosyncrasy of a period. But these vagaries of criticism do not alter the fact that survival for a century is an earnest of ultimate permanence. Shakespeare was secure long before the elegant wits of

INTRODUCTION

the artificial school found him rough and uncouth! and even Johnson, whose judgment was often coloured by the temper of his time, was constrained to remark that, " the poet's works have passed through variations of taste and changes of manners, and as they devolved from one generation to another " they *' have received new honours at every transmission."

The century, then (to quote the same authority once more), is " the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit." We cannot yet say of Byron as Johnson said of Shakespeare, that " he has long outlived his century," but the rest of the passage will nevertheless apply very well to the poet who left us just a hundred years ago—" the effects of favour and competition are at an end; his works support no opinion with arguments nor supply any faction with invective; they can neither indulge vanity nor gratify malignity; but are read without any other reason than the desire of pleasure, and are therefore praised only as pleasure is obtained." One clause alone had to be omitted from that verdict. Johnson remarked of Shakespeare that " the tradition of his friendships and his enmities has perished." Byron is not so fortunate. We could wish, for the poet's own sake, that on several counts we knew as little of him personally as we know of Shakespeare, and that our estimate of his works were as little disturbed by knowledge of certain friendships and enmities. The tradition is in places all too lively, but the fiercest warfare of faction, which flamed out within the present century in

INTRODUCTION

one regrettable, unedifying and unnecessary example, so discredited itself as to render formal refutation superfluous.

Even before he had outlived his century (counting from the date of his death) Byron had lived long enough to assert a claim to be judged by essentials. The accidentals may now sink, if not into complete oblivion, at least into their proper proportion. For many of them are not negligible; on the contrary, they contribute to a right understanding of his character and work. Much as we might wish that personally he should not "abide our question," and that we could say to him as to his greater forerunner, "thou didst tread on earth unguess'd at," the huge body of biographical and critical matter that has grown up around Byron imposes an obligation on all who would try to see him in a true light. It is the obligation of judicial and judicious enquiry and sifting, and the stripping away of encumbrances and distortions, until the man and the poet stand forth in their essence. For within the mass of verbiage—how unwieldy the British Museum Catalogue bears witness—there lies something worthy to be detached and made visible like the statue which, in Pater's familiar image, already exists within the block of marble and waits only to be revealed by the sculptor's discriminating hand. Much of the work has already been done, but the approach to finality has occasionally been retarded by **new** discoveries and fresh research. Such individual efforts, concentrated on a single particular or group of

INTRODUCTION

particulars, often tend to a further distortion. They can only find their true value when they are related to the whole subject. Here is no attempt to write a new biography of Byron. This book pretends to be no more than a series of what may be called intensive studies, illustrating, from known or new material, various aspects of Byron's life, character and work. Cordial thanks are due to Mr. John Murray for permission to quote from Lord Ernie's edition of "Lord Byron's Letters and Journals," and also from Mr. Murray's own edition of "Lord Byron's Correspondence," containing the Dorchester Papers. Contributions have been levied also from various *parerga* of recent more specialised research, such as Dr. J. M. Bulloch's "The House of Gordon," which has done so much to explain the poet's heredity. To Dr. Bulloch's works and kind personal help the author owes a deep debt. Some fresh particulars relating to the circumstances of Byron's birth have recently come to light in a small collection of hitherto unpublished MS. letters presented last September to Aberdeen University Library by a kinsman of Byron's, Mr. Edward Gordon Duff, formerly Sandars Reader in Bibliography in the University of Cambridge. For generous permission to use these letters acknowledgments are due to the Library Committee of Aberdeen University and Mr. P. J. Anderson, the Librarian.

The passages from *The Aberdeen Journal* Have appeared hitherto only in an article contributed by the present writer to *The Aberdeen University Review* for xii

INTRODUCTION

December, 1928. The same article contained part of the letters from the Gordon Duff papers. Portions of Chapters I—IV and of Chapter XIV are reproduced in a modified form from the *Review*.

It may be objected that overmuch space is given to the poet's childhood in Aberdeen and the Aberdeen legends that have grown up around his fame, but the subject may merit rather more detailed attention than formal and justly proportioned biographies could give. The influences of the northern city where Byron spent the eight most impressionable years of his life are worth tracing, and at this distance of time, some fresh point of view, if not many actual new facts, may be discoverable. The task, at any rate, has many attractions and perhaps some excuse for an Aberdonian born and bred, who remembers the now-vanished Byron house in Broad Street and the old buildings (also vanished) of the Grammar School, and who has never passed those doors without seeing in imagination the halting little figure of the boy who trod the Aberdeen streets for awhile and went out from them to become the Pilgrim of Eternity.

I. "BYRON, THE TEMPEST-BORN "

BY one of those happy accidents of inspiration, which befall even the minor poet, it was reserved for the last imitator of Byronic literary satire to strike out the most fitting epithet ever applied to Byron himself. Tempest surrounded his birth, and from his ancestors on both sides of the house he inherited a tempestuous and wayward nature. One of them made this Aeschylean family curse articulate in a bitter cry : " Jean, I can tak' no rest," exclaimed George Gordon, sixth Laird of Gight, to his wife, who tried to turn him away from a plan of revenge, " I know I will die upon a scaffold. Thair is an evill turn in my hand quhilk I avow to God presentlie to performe." Evil turns lay close to the hand of the long line of those Gight Gordons, turns so many and so evil that the historian¹ who first brought their tale of passion and crime to light in full detail compared his story to the Newgate Calendar, and, as the other side of the house was " sic mannie, sic horsie," to quote the northern proverb (i.e., one no better than the other) he gave his comparison a twist and called it the " Newstead Calendar."

The last to hold the lands of Gight was the thirteenth of her unlucky line. With Catherine Gordon, Mrs. Byron,

I See Dr. J. M. Bulloch: " The House of Gordon "; also " The Romantic Adventures of Byron's Ancestors."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

passed the heritage held by the family since, on Nov. 1, 1490, it came by excambion for Aboyne, to Sir William Gordon, younger son of the second Earl of Huntly by his second wife Anabella Stuart, daughter of James I of Scotland. With the Gordons' lairdship of Gight began such a tempestuous tale of family mischance and crime as even Plantagenets and early Tudors could hardly parallel. Battle, murder and sudden death are the three *leit^motiven* of the amazing drama.

In brief—but the whole romantic story should be read in Dr. Bulloch's "House of Gordon"—the hand of fate fell on the House of Gight on this wise :

William, the first Laird, was killed at Flodden; one of his sons is believed to have fallen at Pinkie, where the husband of his daughter Catherine certainly lost his life. Another son-in-law perished in a duel. A grandson, John, fell fighting in Flanders, and that grandson's son, John Gordon, was art and part in the murder of Wallenstein. In that affair John Gordon was a chief conspirator, although not the actual assassin. Catherine's son, again, was murdered.

The fate of William, the second Laird, is obscure; but his son and successor, George (first of that name), was killed in a duel with Forbes of Towie (1579). The husband of George's only child, Elizabeth, died under suspicion of poison. The succession passed next to John, fourth Laird and second son of William, first Laird. He had six children, whose record is from first to last a tale of bloodshed direct or indirect. William **had** at least

" BYRON, THE TEMPEST-BORN "

four murders to his account; John was hanged at Edinburgh for murdering Lord Moray; Alexander ended more respectably in Holland, where he fell in battle; George was killed by the Master of Monteith; Margaret's step-father-in-law was one of brother William's victims, Catherine, the youngest, was hit more nearly, for William slew her husband, John Keith of Clachriach, in 1587, at the Justice Port of Aberdeen.

This redoubtable William, who in due time succeeded as fifth Laird, had eight children of his body begotten. Of these, George and John, the two eldest, make no very sensational figure, but William was killed at Turriff; Patrick (a murderer), Adam, Alexander and Robert were all exiled; and his daughter, Elspet, was accused of a brutal assault upon a man. But if John left small record of scandal himself, his seed was not to escape, for his son, Nathaniel, lived so little free from guile that he came to the scaffold in 1646.

The sixth Laird was George aforesaid. With him begins a succession of four Georges. George, seventh Laird, was excommunicated, and George, eighth Laird, besieged his mother's house; George, ninth Laird, perished we know not how. The fate of his successor, John, is equally obscure.

The inheritance now passed to the distaff side, and the holder of the lands was Mary Gordon, who married Alexander Davidson of Newton. Her son, Alexander Davidson Gordon (note the family arrangement which imposed the name of Gordon on the husbands and

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

children of heiresses), the eleventh heir male, was drowned in the Ythan, not without suspicion of suicide. His son, George Gordon, twelfth Laird, drowned himself in the Bath Canal, and was succeeded by his daughter, Catherine, for whom fate had strange things in store. She was to lose the inheritance of her forebears through a marriage with a man in whose veins ran blood as turbulent as her own, and she was to bear a son whose immortality was to secure for herself undying remembrance and no small measure of reproach.

The house into which Catherine Gordon married—if she can be said to have married into a family, for in reality it was the other way about—was of older lineage than hers, but not less high-spirited. The Buruns, who came over with the Conqueror, may not have been Crusaders, as their poet descendant proudly believed, but they fought honourably at Cressy, Bosworth Field, Edgehill and Marston Moor. Midway in the eighteenth century the credit of the race declined : its reputation grew doubtful, and at length unsavoury. Some taint of madness there must have been in the poet's grand-uncle, the fifth lord, who killed his neighbour, Mr. Chaworth, in a duel conducted irregularly, and some said murderously, at a London tavern. Lord Byron, after trial by his peers, was found guilty of manslaughter, and, on a point of privilege, escaped all punishment. He was discharged " on payment of the fees." Branding on the **hand**, to which, despite privilege, a peer so convicted was **liable, was dispensed with, but there was no evading**

"BYRON, THE TEMPEST-BORN "

another brand. The mark of Cain was upon him; he lived apart at Newstead, unsocial, morose, credited by his neighbours with acts of outrage which were doubtless fictions, but had some foundation in his loose and violent character. The legendary house of Newstead, with its mouldering Gothic, lent itself to the further creation of legend. The fearful country-folk imagined that the old lord held traffic with the powers of evil. He lived dubiously, went always armed, and was subject to wild fits of fury. Discount local myth as you may, this William, fifth Lord Byron, remains a sinister, brooding, uncanny figure.

He had a brother, John the Admiral, so pursued by tempests when he put to sea that men called him " Foul-weather Jack." The Admiral, like his brother, was irascible and somewhat loose-living. He married a Cornishwoman, Sophia Trevanion, by whom he had two sons and four daughters. One daughter, Juliana, married her first cousin, the Hon. William Byron, son of William, the old Lord Byron, surnamed " the Wicked," who so abhorred the match that he pursued young William with insensate spleen. He vowed that if the heir should come into his own it should be a Newstead not worth having. Deliberately, therefore, the old malignant compassed the ruin of the estate. But fate defeated his revenge : William did not live to inherit, and his son, William John, died at the Siege of Calvi in Corsica while his grandfather yet lived, and so cleared the way for the poet's ultimate succession.

BYBON IN PERSPECTIVE

Failing succession in the direct line, John Byron, son of the Admiral, was next heir—a prospect which came nearer to him during the last seven years of his stormy career. John, as gay and dashing and defiant of convention as any Gordon, was in 1785 thirty years of age—ex-Guardsman, gambler, profligate, everlastingly in debt, a peril to women, but so handsome and fascinating that none called him any harder name than "Mad Jack." For the world has always a soft side towards your taking rascal.

Of this temper, then, were the two lawless houses of Gordon and of Byron, which Destiny was waiting to bring together in a union of strange issues.

It was on the 13th of May, 1785, unlucky day of the unlucky month, that these two turbulent streams of life were united by the marriage of Captain John Byron with Catherine Gordon, heiress of Gight and—further evil omen—thirteenth of her line. It is an old story now. Captain Byron, seducer and spendthrift, had rim off with Amelia D'Arcy, Baroness Conyers in her own right, and wife of Lord Carmarthen. On her divorce by Carmarthen, John Byron married her. She died on January 26, 1784, leaving him with one little girl, the Hon. Augusta Byron, another child of tempest, about whose head was one day to break a storm that wrecked her life.

Free to marry again, Captain Byron lost no time in looking out for another wife. The lady's first qualification had to be one in which he himself was eternally lack-⁶

"BYRON, THE TEMPEST-BORN "

ing—a well-filled purse. With an engaging cynicism he went openly fortune-hunting, and such was the rascal's address and personal charm that he not only won an heiress, but inspired in her a real passion which burned with all the fierceness and impetuosity of her race, and would not be quenched even when she realised how ill a bargain she had made.

Catherine Gordon came to John Byron a well-tochered maiden. She was worth at least £22,580 in lands, Aberdeen Bank shares, salmon fishings and timber on her estates. Well-husbanded, her property should have been worth far more, for these figures represent the total realised by forced sales made in order to liquidate Captain Byron's never-ending debts.

From the very moment of marriage, the work of spoliation went forward gaily. Mr. and Mrs. Byron Gordon led a nomadic life. They went to Scotland firafc of all. Two months and two days after their marriage a rumour that the precious pair had already separated ran through Aberdeen. On the evening of July 14, Captain Byron made his appearance in that city minus his lady, and it was said he was going to Gight. The mystery of Mrs. Byron's non-appearance on this occasion has never been cleared up. She cannot have been far away, fo? there is ample evidence that until the late autumn of 1785 they were at Gight or in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Byron's cousin, young Mr. Alex. Russell, **son** of the Laird of Aden, visited the happy couple, who were already cutting wide swathes in the Gight inherit-

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

ance. Mr. Russell noted in his diary¹ that he was much struck by the extravagance of the establishment. High festivity reigned in the house, there was " dancing and deray," the sanctity of the Sabbath being saved one Saturday night only by a very narrow margin. To young Russell's " great relief, the reels left off just before the clock struck midnight."

The game of ducks and drakes went forward apace. Mere hospitality and lavish living would not have wrought such speedy mischief as was impending, but Captain Jack was already over head and ears in debt when he won Miss Gordon, and as there was no marriage settlement, his creditors lost no time in falling upon his wife's fortune. He did not make himself exactly popular in Aberdeenshire, and his claim to vote in the Parliamentary Election of 1786 was disallowed, although he put himself forward as " John Byron Gordon of Gight." That at this time he was playing up to the part of the Laird is evident from an advertisement in *The Aberdeen Journal* of March 18, 1786 :

To be Sett

The Mains of Gight

Enquiries of Mr. Byron Gordon, Gight.

Here he was offering on lease lands that his reckless conduct was rapidly alienating. Negotiations were already afoot for the sale of the estates. This proved

¹ See " The House of Gordon," Vol. I.

" BYRON, THE TEMPEST-BORN "

a difficult matter, but in 1787 Lord Aberdeen bought Gight for his son, Lord Haddo. Every penny of the purchase price, £17,880, except £1,222, 10s. and £8,000 reserved for Mrs. Byron's own use and put out on mortgage, was swallowed up by Captain Byron's creditors.

By this time the Byron Gordons had left Gight for good. In the summer of 1786 they had gone to South » Warnborough, in Hampshire, and thence to Cowes. After the sale was completed, they retired to Chantilly, to avoid creditors still unsatisfied, and Mrs. Byron at any rate remained in France until the close of 1787. There were reasons why she should wish to return and reasons why her husband should not accompany her. In September 1787 a friend of the family had stated both these reasons in a letter.

" She is big with bairn and he is off to France for debt, where she, unhappy woman, must follow soon."¹

If prenatal influences count at all, then the bairn in this case had anything but fair play. During the whole of the year 1786 Mrs. Byron had been in a continual ferment about her financial affairs. All but ruined, she was making desperate, though secret, efforts to save something for herself out of the wreck. The critical year 1787, when she saw her lands, her bank shares, the Gight timber and fishing rights all sold and the price swallowed up, leaving only a bare pittance still intact, must have been even less comfortable, for dims were

1 Letter from Captain Wm. Abercromby of Glassaugh, Sept. 9, 1787.

B W O N I N P E R S P E C T I V E ,

still active, and the wherewithal no longer easily procurable, securities having vanished. Letters written by her relations and friends reflect Mrs. Byron's misery in the phrases, " unhappy woman," " poor unfortunate creature.'"

Added to this was the worry of Captain Byron's continued extravagance. All this time he was piling up new debts, the particulars of which have lately come to light and will be given in their proper place. For Jack Byron to owe was to importune his wife to grant him fresh supplies out of her now scanty resources. She found it impossible to refuse, and on at least two occasions sought legal protection against her own weakness. Was ever woman in such humour won? There was no breaking the power her husband had over her, for on her side, at any rate, there was real passion and an almost Mrs. Micawber-like fidelity. Between the devil and the deep sea, she awaited the birth of her child, wondering often, no doubt, what was to become of them both and how the new mouth was to be filled. Ancestry on both sides of the house threatened the unborn with evils enough, without this added misfortune of an expectant mother harassed by worry, chagrin, and love contending with resentment.

II. NEW LIGHT ON MRS. BYRON'S TROUBLES

LATE in 1787, Mrs. Byron returned to London and took lodgings at 16 Holies Street, Oxford Street, where, on January 22nd, 1788, in the back drawing-room, her son was born. The persons who assisted directly or indirectly at that event were Mrs. Mills the nurse, Mr. Combe the man-midwife, and Dr. Denman. In the background hover Hanson, the solicitor familiar in the Byron story, and Mrs. Hanson, who recommended the nurse. Around Mrs. Byron* however, there moved at that time certain others not hitherto known. Their names and their business have come to light in the correspondence recently presented to Aberdeen University by Mr. E. Gordon Duff. These letters supply fresh details of the embarrassments and anxieties that beset Mrs. Byron immediately before and immediately after her ordeal. They also afford most interesting particulars of Captain Byron's reckless way of life and of his wife's actual financial position at the critical period.

Captain Byron's whereabouts were for the moment obscure, but he is dimly traceable at Park and then presumably at Dover, where he was gaily contracting more debt. Eventually, on or about March 10, he emerged for a moment upon the London scene.

The particular financial worries weighing upon Mrs.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

Byron's mind during her confinement were : provision for her own immediate necessities, the problem of meeting her husband's obligations, which had once more reached a crisis, and a scheme to secure for herself some small settled income from the poor remnant of her fortune. Odds and ends of business relating to the disposal of Gight were also being adjusted with the Commissioners and Arbiters in Edinburgh by Mr. James Hay, the Gight factor at Fyvie, who was anxious to obtain a full discharge of his intromissions. Writing on January 21, 1788, to Mr. James Watson, W.S., Edinburgh, agent for the Commissioners, Mr. Hay begs " to be recommended to Mr. Byron in the kindest manner and will be happy to hear of Mrs. Byron's safe delivery."

Mr. Hay's accounts are important only to specialists in the history of Gight and its alienation. The main financial position of the Byron pair at this time is made clear in a letter of the 18th January from Mr. Watson to the Arbiters in Edinburgh. These were Henry Erskine, Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, and Mr. Charles Gordon of Braid. From this it appears that by an interim award of the Arbiters in a submission by Mr. and Mrs. Byron to them, there is £5,768, the balance of the price of Gight (as at 24 November last), declared vest in trust. Mr. Watson goes on to show that there had been presented to him for acceptance drafts of Mrs. Byron for £420 in favour of Mr. Perregaux of Paris, " who writ to me he had actually advanced £200." On the 14th December Mr. Watson had " remitted to Lon-

12

NEW LIGHT ON MRS. BYRON'S TROUBLES

don on account of Mrs. Byron, who is lying-in there, £50, 5s.," and he further states that there is a draft of Mr. Byron's from Dover endorsed to " Mr. Gilb. Mason due to-morrow for £81." Consequently he says he " must beg your approbation of the said remittance and liberty to pay said £200 and £81 as the doing so seems unavoidable."

To this letter is appended the following note :

" We approve of your paying the sums above mentioned.

HENRY ERSKINE.

CHA. GORDON."

On January 21st, Mr. Perregaux writes to Mr. Watson from Paris, acknowledging Mr. Watson's letter of January 11, informing him that Mr. and Mrs. Byron's affairs are in the hands of two gentlemen for settlement and that an order will be made. Mr. Perregaux therefore hopes that his £200 will shortly be repaid. As he is anxious to save the parties expense, he wishes the sum remitted to the London correspondent of his business house.

The Gordon Duff papers now bring us to a date exactly one week after the birth of the poet, and at this point a new figure enters into the affair. This is a Mr. John Leslie, who claims to be " a very near relation of Mrs. Byron's."¹

1 Mr. Leslie remains, although an interesting, a rather mysterious figure, for he eludes identification, even by the chief authority on Gordon genealogy, Dr. J. M. Bulloch, who cannot as yet place him in the Gight family-tree.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

would be of any service and therefore think it proper to decline speaking to her on the subject. . . .

. . . I am altogether unacquainted with Mr. Byron, and cannot with propriety interfere in any way with the domestic affairs of him or his family. Besides, Mrs. Byron Gordon, though a very near relation of mine, has ever since her marriage and indeed since the Death of her Parents kept herself aloof from most of her relations here. Previous to that, her *mother* and *she* lived at my house and every civility and attention in the power of me and my family was shown them and it gave me pleasure to have it in my power. Her Father was an honest man and to his Mother I think myself under many and great obligations. Forgive this digression, but it is to explain my declining your present request, but be assured I am as before, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

JOHN LESLIE.

On 29th February, 1788, Mr. Thomas Beckett,¹ Berwick Street, London, writes to Mr. Watson giving a detailed schedule of Captain Byron's debts, which then stood at £1,170. There were, however, other claims pending, and if these were made good, Mr. Beckett

¹ Thomas Beckett, attorney, admitted in King's Bench before 1782; admitted in Chancery, 10th May 1785. Practised at Princes Street, Leicester Fields, 1782-83; Berwick Street, Soho, 1785-90; 8 New Street, Covent Garden, 1794-95; Clement's Inn, 1797-99. After 1801 he disappears from Law Lists,

NEW LIGHT ON MRS. BYRON'S TROUBLES

declares that " nothing less than £1,800 would make Mr. Byron a free man." The lawyer goes on to give an interesting picture of the prodigal's progress. His remarks show further that Mrs. Byron, desperately anxious though she was to save something of her little remaining money for herself and her child, doubted nevertheless her own ability to hold out against her husband's personal importunities. One phrase of hers, quoted by Mr. Beckett, affords memorable proof of Mad Jack's almost hypnotic power over the woman who, amid ruin, still loved him : "*Mrs. Byron is afraid that she has not the resolution to refuse any request Mr. Byron may make to her personally.*"

Mr. Beckett's letter proves him to have been an agreeable combination of the precise man of business with the man of feeling. The many sidelights on the Byron *minage* at this period and Mr. Beckett's shrewd appreciation of Captain Byron's character make it worth quoting in full:

(Mr. Beckett to Mr. Watson.)

Berwick Street,

London, 29 February, 1788.

Sir,

I am desired by Mrs. Byron to give an answer to your letter of the 19th February instant together with her sentiments on the subjects with which I cannot help admitting that mine entirely coincide.

B

17

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

The debts which Mr. Byron owes at Odiham exclusive of some demands of the servants who were only paid on account, together with costs accrued against him, and also exclusive of a demand which a Mr. Huntingford, an Attorney at law, against whom I have filed a bill for an account, pretends to have against him for £100, amount as near as I can ascertain to	£450
Mr. Byron from his own showing ¹ standi indebted to his brother for debts paid by him at Paris, which payment I have some doubt about.	£200
To Rennie and Cleghorn his present servants.	£120
	£50
To an old debt in Paris not contained in the above	£60
To a Viscount De Hoyle at Bulleigne. ¹	£90
To Mr. James Mellon, Tailor, for his bill for Cloaths and for money lent and paid to his account for which a legacy of £500 is assigned but for the payment of which the assets are uncertain at least.	£200
	£1170

¹ So deleted in MS.

NEW LIGHT ON MRS. BYRON'S TROUBLES

So that calculating the balance due to the servants at £30 and supposing Mr. Huntingford makes good his claim, nothing less than £1800 will make Mr. Byron a free man.

Last summer Mr. Byron proposed paying off his debts but when he got hold of £700, being the balance left of the last £1000 you sent Mrs. Byron, which would have been sufficient then for that purpose, he set off with it for Paris and in two months had not a guinea left, and that immediately after he had just gotten out of as enthralled a situation as he is in at present.

After such an instance and many other similar, I am afraid that discharging the present debts would only be paving the way to the accumulation of fresh ones. The principal now left in the hands of the Arbiters is so reduced as to afford a very narrow income. What will be the case if the present debts are discharged?

Mrs. Byron is afraid that she has not the resolution to refuse any request Mr. Byron may make to her personally, but she begs that the Trustees or Arbiters if they have the power will not take notice of any application from her through Mr. Byron or otherwise but as far as in them lays protect her present property being confident that any further advance would but be putting off another year and then matters would again be in the same situation a* they are at present.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

I have been induced to write this letter out of humanity to Mrs. Byron and her infant and in confidence to you as a gentleman who will easily see it is not calculated for the perusal of Mr. Byron and of course the contents must not be directly or indirectly communicated to him.

If you and the Arbiters think with Mrs. Byron and me on this subject it is very well, if to the contrary, you will be so good as destroy this letter and suppress the contents. Mrs. Byron begs you would be so good as communicate to me the power of the Arbiters over the remainder of her property and how far they can protect the same, and what is their final determination on this business.

I am,

With great respect,

Your obedient servant,

THOMAS BECKETT.

Will you favour me with an account of such items as you have remitted to Mr. Huntingford on account of Mr. Byron. Exclusive of the above debts Mr. Byron owes £80 at Bulloigne.

I have read over this letter to Mrs. Byron who says it is expressly what she meant me to say on the subject.

All this time proposals were afoot to settle a sum of £4222 on Mrs. Byron and her children, and the question

20

NEW LIGHT ON MRS. BYRON'S TROUBLES

had been further gone into with the Commissioners and Arbiters in Edinburgh. Mr. Beckett had heard from Mr. Watson on the matter. Re-enter now Captain Byron, who appears for a moment in London. It seems to have been decided to let him have some more money, for about the first week of March he had come to town eagerly expecting a remittance. Of Mr. and Mrs. Byron's urgent necessities Mr. Beckett leaves us in no doubt, and his letter also implies that the gallant Captain is dodging his creditors—he is "obliged to be at hide and seek."

(Mr. Beckett to Mr. Watson.)

Berwick Street,

London,

11th March, 1788.

Sir,

I received yours and find that after the settlement of £4222 on Mrs. Byron and her children there will remain a surplus for the payment of Mr. Byron's debts and for their present support, which sum he says he expected you would have remitted ere this to me. How it is situated I cannot tell but he says the order of the arbiters for the money would be obtained as a matter of course and that he understood the money would be in town upon his arrival. Until it arrives he will be obliged to be at hide and seek. Such was the conversation I had with this unfortunate man on Sunday last when he left

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

town and has since gone to a private lodging. I this morning received a letter from Mrs.¹Byron enclosing one from her husband written in a very melancholy strain declaring he has not a farthing left and she informs me she is in a similar situation. What will be the end of this imprudent man's conduct I cannot divine, but I am desired by both of them to entreat you to delay as little as possible the remittance of the balance that the purposes for which it is designed may be speedily obtained.

I am,

Your obedient servant,

THOMAS BECKETT.

It is reasonable to suppose that before Captain Byron sought " a private lodging," he stayed at Holies Street, and this would very likely be the first occasion on which he had seen his hopeful son. That his presence had further straitened the *res angusta domi* is sufficiently manifest from husband's and wife's cry of distress echoed by Mr. Beckett, and the urgency of the appeal to 'Edinburgh.

The Gordon¹Dilff papers give yet another glimpse Of Mrs. 'Byron's 'thronging troubles in abetter which Abe wrote to Mr. Watson on April 7, 1788. It refers to a debt¹ due to Mrs. Byron by her uncle Captain Alex. Davidson and others upon the lands and estates of Newton, amounting to £3,972 15s. Davidson had three

I See " The House of Gordon," Vol. I I , pp. 822, 824.

NEW LIGHT ON MRS. BYRON'S TROUBLES

daughters who died unmarried, and it appears from the Gordon Duff papers that there had been some proposal that Mrs. Byron should make an abatement in favour of Davidson's children. According to Mr. Alex. Innes of Breda, one of the "others," that question was to be left entirely to Mrs. Byron herself. Towards Mr. Innes and the Davidson kinsfolk Mrs. Byron bore no good-will, evidently believing that they were trying to cheat her of her due. The letter affords striking evidence of her anger and distress.

(Mrs. Byron to Mr. Watson.)

London.

April 7, 1788.

I have received yours and wish you much joy upon your marriage which ! only heard of the other day. Pray what paper is that I am to sign? You say to Mr. Beckett that you are in hopes of getting me something, notwithstanding what Mr. Innes, Breda, wrote. Pray what did he write? All that I understood was from Mr. Byron that you, Mr. Erskine and Mr. Gordon was. of opinion I could make nothing of it. Pray be so good as write to me for my satisfaction upon what grounds you give that opinion, as I know nothing about it at present. If you give a good reason why I cannot make anything of it, I am satisfied, but if it is possible, have it I will, if I should go to law about [it], as I

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

detest them and would not do anything for them, if I had it in my power to keep them from starving. I hope you will do all you can for me. You may think them poor, but consider, I am as poor as them. I suppose Mrs. Clark¹ has been speaking to you. I wish she would only meddle with her own affairs. She had always a great partiality for the Davidsons, and I dare say will try to influence you. For God's sake do all you can for me or give me a good reason why you cannot. Write me if you have any objection to do anything in the business. I shall expect your answer with impatience, and believe me, with regard

C. BYRON GORDON.

If you really think I can make nothing of it, and give me your reason for thinking so, I am satisfied, and cannot help it, but if I can get anything I don't see why I am to be cheated out of it, particularly as I am in such want of it. I am sure my debt should be paid before any other, as there was security taken for it upon the Estate, and if they had no right to pay it, why would they have paid £100 of it to my uncle Archibald Gordon? As for Innes, I don't believe a word he says, as he always

¹ Evidently the Mrs. Clark who writes on August 16, 1786, to Mr. Russell of Aden: "I wish you and Mrs. Byron's friends could only get but £100 a year secured to her, but I will not meddle in it, for I have done all I can for her, poor unhappy woman." In 1791 a Mr. Clark in Edinburgh was one of the signatories to an authority for Mrs. Byron to receive £100 of the balance of the price of Gight due by Lord Aberdeen. See "House of Gordon," Vol. I, pp. 129, 134.

NEW LIGHT ON MRS. BYRON'S TROUBLES

wanted to get something of me for them. Get the interest also. I even will have that, if I can, if there be any due. That I suppose you know, if there is.

Another letter from Mr. Leslie indicates that a further remittance has been made to him from Edinburgh, and that he is expecting immediate heavy demands which will rapidly exhaust the money entrusted to him. That Mrs. Byron was herself extravagant is not probable, for during the Aberdeen period she did wonders on very slight resources, showing an excellent thrift and management—derived, most likely, from her maternal ancestors, the gainful Duffs. The presumption is that her perpetual need was due to her inability "to refuse any application Mr. Byron might make to her personally"; and that, when a month or two earlier Mr. Leslie was asked to advise her to be prudent, the sudden melting-away of the sums he had paid out to her was owing to no fault of her own, but to her husband's insatiable rapacity.

(Mr. Leslie to Mr. Watson.)

Tuesday, 15th April 1788.

Sir,

I have this morning paid Mrs. Byron £50 and by her note to me I find she knows the amount of your remittance to me and has asked for another £50. As she goes into the country in a few days, I have in answer told her that my instructions were to pay her £50 which

1BYRGN IN PERSPECTIVE

I had done *maad* she might have another £¹50 if she desired it, and that il should write to Edinburgh for further instructions respecting the business. *I* take it for granted she will soon apply for the other £50 and shall be glad to know from you whether I am to go on giving her a iFifty as often as your cash with me lasts or if I am only to pay her at stated times and sums. Let me have your answer by return of post, before which you may conclude *she* has got £100 of the £200. My compliments to all ifrtends with you.

I am, in great haste,

Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

JOHN LESLIE.

Regarding 'Mrs. Byron's further movements during the next two years, the biographies of her son are practically silent;¹ It has been assumed by one diligent collector²

¹ Moore is vague about the transition from London to Aberdeen. His words might mean departure in 1788 or not till 1790. Prothero, "Letters and Journals," Vol. I, is equally indefinite. He says: "Shortly after the birth of her son, Mrs. Byron settled in Aberdeen, where she lived for upwards of eight years." The "eight years" implies a hiatus of two years, as the Aberdeen sojourn did not end till 1798. Jeaffarson, "The Real Lord Byron," says "an early day of 1190." Ethel Colburn Mayne, "Byron," says "when her little boy was two years old, Mrs. Byron left London for Aberdeen." Bulloch, "The House of Gordon," Vol. I, gives 1790.

²Rev. W. Rogerson. Articles, "Byron and Aberdeen," published in *Mamcoord*, May-Augurt'1902.

NEW LIGHT ON MRS. BYRON'S TROUBLES

of Byroniana that she left London for Scotland in the April of 1788. He quotes no authority, and certainly had not seen the foregoing letter, which speaks of impending departure in that very month. But "going into the country" can scarcely be taken as implying the then formidable journey to Scotland. Had that been (Mrs. Byron's intention Mr. Leslie would have taken care to inform Mr. Watson more precisely 'Of her destination. The probability is that she was going somewhere in the neighbourhood of London for the rest and change her teen experience and her child's welfare would render advisable. It has been assumed that Mrs. Byron sought asylum with her relations in Scotland during this period, but no clear evidence on this point is forthcoming. Her movements remain doubtful until, somewhere in the earlier or middle months of 1790, she went to live obscurely in Aberdeen, where in after years admirers of Byron's genius were to evolve a huge Byronic legend—motley, romantic, pleasing, at times pathetic, and (like all such legends) in various particulars utterly untrue.

III. THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

ALTHOUGH Byron spent less than a fifth of his life in Aberdeen, "the Aberdonian Epoch," as Gait called it, has an importance greater than its strict numerical proportion to the poet's span of years. In and from Aberdeen he received his earliest impressions. His young eyes opened upon the northern scene, and it was there that he first began to construct for himself his vision of the external world. He can scarcely have remembered any former place of abode, and in his awakening to consciousness his experience must have been that of the native-born Aberdonian of his day. That experience entered into the warp and woof of his character, and left an indelible impression.

Some have regarded the Aberdonian epoch as a misfortune. A very able biographer¹ has drawn too heart-rending a picture of the poet's early childhood, which she has represented as a perpetual torture of his sensitive nature. On the question of mere locality, also, she takes too dismal a view of Byron's surroundings. This is pardonable in one not to the manner born, but when she speaks of Aberdeen as "a depressing northern **town**," she is somewhat wide of the mark. The city in the last decade of the eighteenth century certainly

¹ Ethel Colburn Mayne: "Byron."

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

had none of her present outward magnificence, but depressing she was not. The town, if not imposing, was well-found and well set on her hills. Within her narrow borders she held a strenuous civic and academic life. The intellectual interests of the citizens extended far beyond the confines of the "four Bows," the historic gateways of the city. The concert, the play, the assembly and the social club flourished. The Professors of Marischal College announced courses of popular lectures for the citizens, and although these were oftener in natural science than in literature, literature was well cared for otherwise. The advertisements of Brown the bookseller, whose shop and library bore the classical sign of the "Homer's Head," prove how intelligent was the public demand for books. The town had three circulating libraries. Brown and his fellow-booksellers not only advertised the new volumes actually in stock, but also practised the art of the preliminary announcement to perfection. At Brown's the stock of new engravings reflected the citizens' cultivated interest in art, which is ever nourished by a prosperous commerce. In witness to the city's commerce, her ships lay moored in the natural tidal harbour, a fair estuary dotted with green Inches, or passed, white-sailed, out and in upon their lawful occasions, bringing timber from Norway, the Baltic and America, or taking wool or salted herrings to London and the Continental marts. In their season the whalers put out for the Arctic, and the annual sailing of the fleet was a notable local event. No

BYRON *m* PERSPECTIVE

smoke-pall gullied the brilliant air; the country crept up unspoiled to the very point where streets and lanes began. Then, as now, it was a place of clear atmosphere, and could be genial enough on summer days and in the not infrequent brighter tracts of weather in autumn and early winter; but it knew; too, shrewd spring winds, days of rain, lashing tempests, and sudden onsets of snowdrift that might, at an hour's notice, make the streets impassable and cut off all traffic with the outlying countryside.

But these disabilities of weather are redressed on balance, and make Aberdeen no more depressing than Edinburgh, which is subject to the assaults of an even more trying climate. "The wind," says Stevenson of his own winter-bound city, "may still be cold, but there is a briskness in the air that stirs good blood."

To Aberdeen, on a day unknown, in 1790, Mrs. Byron Gordon, the impoverished heiress of Gight, brought her two-year-old boy. She came to shelter and eke out her penury in the remote northern city, partly, no doubt, to be clear of her scapegrace husband, and partly because living was reasonable there. It may be, too, she was drawn by that homing instinct which always asserts itself in misfortune. The well-tochered maiden who had come to Captain Byron with so handsome a fortune had in less than three years seen him fulfil the satirical ballad-maker's prophecy¹ and "squander the lands o' Gight awa'." On the interest of a bare four thousand

¹See Peter Buchains "Ancient Ballads of Northern Scotland."

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

pounds she would make a shift to live and bring up her infant. Catherine Gordon had her faults, but lack of courage was not among them. In that she was true to her Gordon blood.

It is common knowledge that Mrs* Byron lodged for a time in Virginia Street, next with a Mr. Anderson in Queen Street, and for the longest period at 04 Broad Street, where she rented a flat, the furnishing of which made sad inroads on her available money. To-day the streets in which she lived may not give the stranger the best impression of Mrs. Byron's surroundings, but in 1790 she could not have chosen a more reputable neighbourhood. Broad Street was then the principal thoroughfare. The house was handsomely built, and her flat was commodious as her needs demanded. The principal living-room measured 17j by 12 feet. Her own room was twelve feet square, and her son's bedroom eleven feet by nine. The remaining bedroom measured ten feet by twelve, and the kitchen fourteen by fourteen. Between Mrs. Byron's room and the living-room was a little dressing-room. The flat may not have been splendid, but, as the times went, it was good, and certainly not "scrubby," as one writer calls it* Of the six well-proportioned windows commanding the street, three lighted the principal room, one the dressing-room, and the remaining two Mrs. Byron's own room.

Town residence was varied by country visits to Bmllater and Honeybrae, a house some three miles from the city-

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

and at that time quite in the country. The fashionable West End has now crept up almost to the walls of Honeybrae, which still, however, stands in open ground, and the house itself remains exactly as it was when young Byron ran about its doors.

If Mrs. Byron Gordon thought to escape her husband by retreat to Aberdeen, she was mistaken, for during the time when she lodged in Queen Street, Captain Byron Gordon turned up again, like the bad penny he was, and his wife fell an easy prey to further despoilment. He had made ducks and drakes of his wife's property, but she still loved him passionately. That passion of those late descendants of two long lines of wild, passionate and often worthless forebears accounts for much in the character of George Gordon Noel, Lord Byron. Catherine Gordon loved and yet hated, hated and yet loved Jack Byron in a mad chaos of attraction and repulsion, and their son has left definite and detailed evidence of how he was tortured by a chaotic mind. Unable to resist her fascinating blackguard, Mrs. Byron Gordon made an ill-starred attempt to live with him again. It would not do. Very soon he removed to other lodgings further along the street, where, in a burst of paternal affection, he made an equally ill-starred effort to put up with George's company. A single night of this stirring young man was sufficient to rout the gallant ex-Guardsman. In the morning George was returned, without thanks, to the custody of his mother.

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

That visit of Captain Byron's to Aberdeen in the autumn of 1790 was the last his wife had to endure. Of his financial operations he has left legal record in the Register of Deeds of the Commissary Court. Searching there last September for some trace of other financial troubles mentioned by Mrs. Byron in one of her letters, the present writer, although failing to find the particulars he immediately sought, lighted on something more important—a document which seems to have been forgotten. It had not altogether escaped notice, for some earlier enquirer had placed a light pencil mark on the margin, and between the leaves lay a marker, a slip of paper black with the dust of many years. The document, however, if observed, has not been referred to in any volume of Byroniana. The entry in the register runs :

FACTORY; John Byron Gordon, Esq to
Mrs. Byron Gordon.

The deed to which the entry refers was executed on the 8th September 1790, and was recorded on February 8, 1791. The original is still extant, and was immediately forthcoming, as is to be expected of the city which boasts the best-ordered records in the kingdom. " Factory," it may be noted, is the Scots legal equivalent of the English " Power of Attorney." In terms of this document, John Byron Gordon, Esq., late of Gight, " intending to go abroad for some time," empowers his wife to uplift part of £1222 10s. from the Earl of Aberdeen, being balance of the price of Gight and vested in his

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

lordship's hands on account of Captain Byron and the said Mrs. Byron Gordon, and payable at the death of Mrs. Margaret Gordon, formerly Duff, widow of Alexander Gordon of Gight. Mrs. Gordon of Gight is to have not exceeding two hundred pounds, as she may find necessary for paying her debts, and Mrs. Byron Gordon is to receive any dividend on the estate of the late Lewis Gordon of Techmuiry. Mr. Watson is named as Agent to the Commissioners and Arbiters in Edinburgh. The deed is signed by John Byron Gordon, and is witnessed by Alexander Crombie, advocate, and James Anderson, perfumer.

This James Anderson is without doubt Mrs. Byron's landlord in Queen Street, whose occupation has not been known hitherto. His name appears in Mrs. Byron's letters written from Aberdeen, and is familiar in most biographies of the poet. Mention of him in a letter, May 5th, 1791, points to the fact that he was concerned pretty intimately in Mrs. Byron's affairs. Many of the particulars here rehearsed are familiar to students of the Gight finances, but the document has one or two points of fresh interest. The sum named, £1222 10s., is referred to by Moore as £1122, to which it had been reduced when Moore found trace of it. It is referred to as £1200 by Mrs. Byron in a "piteous letter" written on January 24, 1791, to her uncle Alexander Russell of Montcoffer.¹ She begs that he will sanction a payment "of £100 at present out of the £1200 settled on me at

¹ See "House of Gordon," Vol. I,

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

Lady Gight's death. I am," she says, " in great want of the money. As the sum is only a hundred pounds, Mr. Duff, Fetteresso has signed the paper and Mr. Watson and Mr. Clark at Edinburgh have agreed to sign it when it is signed by you and Mr. Duff." The signatures of these gentlemen are in accordance with the terms of the Factory. Mrs. Byron adds : " If I was not in great want of the money I would not ask it and it would be doing me a great favour." Whether Mrs. Byron intended to remit part of this sum to her needy lord remains matter of conjecture. He was by this time gone abroad, and a letter of Mrs. Byron's, dated three days earlier, shows that her own personal necessities were now acute, and that at the moment she was feeling not very kindly towards her husband. So serious, in fact, was her plight that she had been driven to write to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Leigh (Frances Byron), with whom she was not personally acquainted, to beg assistance.¹

Aberdeen.

January 21st, 1701.

Dear Madam,

Though I have not the pleasure of being personally known to you, I hope you will forgive this trouble. Some time ago I wrote to Mr. Byron, telling him I had not a farthing in the world nor could I get any at present, and begging him to ask you to lend him thirty pounds

¹ British Museum: Byron-Leigh Correspondence. Add. MSS. 31087.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

or forty pounds to send to me, to which he returned for answer that he could not think of asking you as you had been so good to him but that he had wrote to a person that he hoped would send it me. This was only to put me off, as I don't know a person in the world that would advance that sum for him but yourself and though it is all owing to the debts I became bound to pay for him for the extravagant way he would live when he was here which my income could not afford that I am in this situation, which all comes on me. I only say this to let you know in what situation I am in, and that me nor my child have not at present a farthing nor know where to get one, as the people I am due money to have got arrestments on my income and I cannot receive it till I pay them. The reason I trouble you with this letter is to beg you will have the goodness to lend me thirty or forty pounds. I will pay you honestly in May next. I would not ask you if your mother had not been dead. If it is convenient for you to send it you will be so good as to pay the money to any Bankers in London and send me one of their bills in a letter and I will get the money at a bank here immediately or whatever sum is convenient for you to lend me I will be glad of. I will pay you honestly in May. I beg an answer as soon as possible. Forgive this trouble and believe me to be with sincere regards,

Yours (signature torn out)

Direct for me to be left at the Post Office, Aberdeen*

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

The seal, of red wax, bears the motto " Je ne change qu'en mourant." The Aberdeen postmark is January 28 and the London postmark the 26th. The letter reveals the impulsive, proud, passionate and rather spluttering Mrs. Byron. Her agitation and shame are marked by the frequent repetitions and her anxious insistence on the promise to repay. In punctuation she was never strong, and here it is altogether absent, but is now inserted, so far, for the sake of clearness.

Mrs. Leigh's reception of the letter must have been entirely friendly, for it resulted in an invitation, which, had it been accepted, might have robbed Aberdeen of its share in an illustrious chapter of literary history. This appears from later correspondence. On May 5th, 1791, Mrs. Byron wrote to Mrs. Leigh a letter to which reference has been made elsewhere, but the text has not seen publication in full. It contains valuable documentary evidence as to that vexed question, the poet's lameness; and it proves, also, how anxious Mrs. Byron was to do everything in her power to have it cured. For such anxiety she has not always received due credit.

Aberdeen
8th May, 1791.

My dear Madam,

I received yours some time ago and I am much obliged to you for your kind invitation to France but it will not be possible for me to leave Scotland for some time . . . I hope you will excuse the trouble I am

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

going to give you. It will be doing me a very particular favour if you will send for Mr. Hunter the surgeon and give him the enclosed letter from me. It is about getting a proper shoe for George's foot as I cannot get a right one made here. Mr. Hunter some time ago wrote to a Dr. Livingstone, giving him directions how it should be made, but it never was right made, or it would have answered better, and as Mr. Hunter saw George when he was born I am in hopes that he will be able to give you directions for a proper shoe to be made without seeing it again. Nothing but want of money prevents me sending him up to London for Mr. Hunter to see his foot, as I am perfectly sure he would walk very well if he had a proper shoe and indeed Mr. Hunter said to me that his foot would be very well in time if he could have a proper shoe, I will be much obliged to you if you will send for Mr. Hunter and give him my letter and if he can give directions for a shoe to be made for him from what I have written him I will be much obliged to you. If you will pay the person for it that makes it and send it down to me as soon as it is ready I will pay Mr. Anderson or pay anybody here for it and you can keep it of¹ of the bill due to him. I hope you will forgive this trouble, I would not have put you to the expense of double postage but I do not remember where Mr. Hunter lives and at any rate I will be much obliged to you to take the trouble to speak to him about it. **Pray** what is going on in the world **for** I am quite out of

¹ Vs. " off.'

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

it here. Are we to have war? Pray do you ever hear anything of little Augusta¹ or how she is? Is she in the country or with Lady Holderness?

Believe me to be, dear Madam, with great regard and affection

C. BYBON.

Mrs. Leigh,

89 Brompton Row, near Knight's Bridge, London.

The fact of correspondence between Dr. Livingstone and Dr. John Hunter is well known, but there has been confusion—which arose with Thomas Moore—between this John Hunter the surgeon and his namesake and contemporary, the celebrated anatomist. Could we but discover Dr. Livingstone's letters to Dr. Hunter, "we had known something" (as Newton said, contingent to Cotes' survival); but all efforts to trace the letters have come to nought, and the presumption is that they no longer exist. Apart from that, recent research has done much to clear up the question, and on March 21st, 1928, Dr. H. C. Cameron of Guy's Hospital lectured on "The Lameness of Lord Byron" to the Royal Society of Medicine. Dr. Cameron put forward the new and ingenious theory that Byron suffered from Little's Disease—a tightening of the Achilles tendon² due to retarded respiration at birth. Doctors differ; and the

1 The poet's hall-sister.

2 Byron actually describes lameness arising from injury to "The very tendon which is most acute"—"Don Juan," VIII, 84, 85.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

British Medical Journal, in a leading article, did not wholly endorse Dr. Cameron's theory¹; but the lecture, with its demonstration of Byron's boots (now in the possession of Mr. John Murray) and the lasts (now in Nottingham Museum), prove beyond cavil that, whatever may have been the cause of Byron's lameness, he was not club-footed. Trelawny's sensational story of what he saw when he uncovered the feet of the dead poet—"the feet of a satyr"—is now for ever exploded; Byron's feet were slim and elegant, the trouble arose from inability to put his heel to the ground. One point in Mrs. Byron's letter raises a curious speculation: it is the reference to the settlement of the account for the shoe. It is clear that in some form or another Mrs. Leigh has an account with Mr. Anderson, part of which will be liquidated by Mrs. Byron making a direct payment to her landlord. It looks almost as if Mrs. Leigh were giving Mrs. Byron some stated financial help, perhaps with the rent of the lodgings, for the "bill due to him" is mentioned as if it were a thing of custom.

It is remarkable how distantly Mrs. Byron speaks in her letter of "a Dr. Livingstone." This is too remote, considering the distinguished place which that physician held in the city and university. His father was Thomas Livingstone, F.R.C.P. (Edinburgh), surgeon to the Aberdeen Infirmary, whom Mrs. Ella Hill Burton Rodger, in her "Aberdeen Doctors," confuses with his son William as the doctor who attended Byron.

1 *B.M.J.*, March 81, 1928.

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

In Dr. William Livingstone we make direct touch with those who knew and observed the poet in his infancy, and that touch is made the closer and more real by the portrait which looks down benignly, with features of a gentle and refined intellectuality, from the walls of the Medico-Chirurgical Society's Hall. The Livingstones, father and son, were men to know, very typical in their character of the cultivated Aberdonian society of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Both were universally loved and esteemed. It was said of Dr. William at his death that "to converse with him was to like him, his wit enlivened and left no sting, he possessed a large fund of general knowledge, cultivated and promoted polite literature and the fine arts, and was endowed with a correct and delicate taste. His professional skill was tested by the most extensive practice, and his disinterested disposition was at all times seen in the unremitting attention which he paid to those from whom he could expect no return but gratitude."¹ One may wonder how far this might apply to his professional attendance on Mrs. Byron and her lame boy.

Another eminent Aberdonian with whom the Byrons came into contact (slight, perhaps, but discernible in a single anecdote) was John Stuart of Inchbreck, Professor of Greek at Marischal College. The little Byron appears as a guest in Mr. Stuart's garden, where, with other small boys, he had been allowed to gather fruit. He disappeared for a time, and on his return said that he

1 Aberdeen Journal, 16th Oct. 1822,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

had been carrying some apples to his "poor dear Mother."¹

It has been suggested that Byron's childhood in Aberdeen was one long-drawn-out misery, but it is hard to reconcile this view with his own loyal and affectionate memories of his early days in the north. Even his petulant outburst against Scotland and all things Scotch is discounted by the general tone of his remarks on this subject. That there were scenes with his mother cannot be denied; but it should be remembered that the particulars of these were not collected till nearly thirty years after the event, and that for the intimacies of the Broad Street *mSnage* the chief—perhaps the only—authorities were Mrs. Byron's two servants, Agnes and May Gray. Servants do not usually minimise the sensational.

Much sentiment has been spilt over the anecdotes told to Dr. Ewing, Moore's informant, by May Gray. Some commentators regard her as an angel of light, and dwell fondly on the Bible lessons she gave the future poet; others represent her as careless, unfeeling and cruel. That she deteriorated grievously after her removal to England can hardly be doubted from Hanson's letter,² but that deterioration has coloured one biographer's estimate of the nurse rather unfairly. Miss Colburn Mayne assumes that May Gray was cruel and callous

1 Rogers' "Table Talk," quoted by Bulloch: "House of Gordon," Vol. I.

2 Prothero: "Letters and Journals," Vol. I.

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

even in the Aberdeen days; but of this Byron himself has left no hint.

Other later circumstances have also been thrown back without warrant into the earlier period. Moore, with a lack of precision not unusual in his work, implies that at Aberdeen, Byron was subjected to painful surgical treatment for his lame foot. But the tortures began with the quack Lavender, at Nottingham. Any evidence we possess of Dr. Hunter's and Dr. Livingstone's methods points only to the procuring of "a proper shoe," which seems to indicate a diagnosis very similar to Dr. Cameron's later inference of inability to put the heel to the ground. May Gray certainly said that it was part of her duty to apply bandages; but whether she was referring to her service in Scotland or in England is doubtful. It should be remembered that she gave Dr. Ewing her information many years after the Byrons left Aberdeen, and her memory on dates, into which Ewing would not be likely to enquire minutely, may not have been perfectly clear. That she painted her rôle in rosy colours cannot be denied, and the story lost nothing of glamour in Moore's hands. Miss Mayne is right to take it with a considerable grain of salt, but her dislike of Calvinism has led her a little too far when, referring to May's Bible lessons at bedtime, she says: "Such teachings may be, have often been, associated with personal cruelties," and then engrafts upon the incident a dismal tale of how the nursemaid used to slip out to her lover, **and** leave her imaginative young charge alone in the

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

dark, a prey to nervous terrors—he believed that the Broad Street house was haunted. It will not do to find presumptive evidence of cruelty in the fact that May Gray taught Byron Psalms. It is just open to question whether indeed May was the instructor : probably it was her more serious-minded elder sister, Agnes, whose ministrations May, in her enthusiastic outpourings to Ewing, credited to herself. Byron, we know, turned sharply against May; while for Agnes (who had married and left Mrs. Byron's service) he had an enduring fondness, and there is good evidence that, during one of his holidays at Honeybrae, he went off on his own account to stay with her at Woodside. Agnes's house still stands, dignified, rather grotesquely, with the name " Byron Hall."

Many considerations tend to dismiss the theory that the poet's early childhood was utterly miserable. The tone of his own reminiscences of Aberdeen should suffice. When, in 1810, he met John Scott, his former Aberdeen school-fellow, at Venice, Byron recalled with lively pleasure various landmarks of the city. " To meet with an Aberdonian was at all times a delight to him." To Pryse Lockhart Gordon he said that he had no pleasure equal to that of meeting an old friend of his mother's and of his early age; and it was the scenery of Aberdeenshire that awoke in him

All my boy feelings, all my gentler dreams.

Something of bitterness there **was**, but **the** sweet out-

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

Weighed the sour, and Byron's bickerings with his mother had not then reached that cruel intensity which is reflected in the petulant and unfilial letters of his adolescence. The Aberdeen incidents cannot have been more than the naughtiness of a refractory small boy, and the retaliations of a fond and very much exasperated Mamma. We know how she would "pass from passionate caresses to the repulsion of actual disgust, and then devour him with kisses again and swear his eyes were as beautiful as his father's." Once more it would appear that the later period has coloured and distorted the accounts of the earlier. Mrs. Byron, for all her trials, had not at that time become the coarse termagant of common representation. The sources of our information as to her character have not been scrutinised with sufficient rigour. They are, first, Captain Byron's testimony; second, the servants' stories, filtered through Ewing to the embroidered pages of Moore; and third, Dr. Glennie of Dulwich, headmaster of Byron's first English school, who is responsible for a specific attack on Mrs. Byron which does him little credit. Moore, who never met Mrs. Byron, accepted Glennie's remarks apparently without question, and enlarged on them with unction. Succeeding biographers or commentators followed in the vilification of the unfortunate lady, and it was not until Lord Ernie edited Byron's "Letters and Journals" that anyone said a kindlier word for the poet's mother.

Captain Byron's statement that his wife was "very

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

amiable at a distance, but I defy you and all the Apostlg*? to live with her for two months, for if anybody could live with her it was me," does not come very convincingly from the lips of the author of her misfortunes. Against this should be placed the wife's remark about her husband : " . . . his foibles—they deserve no other name," and her temperate, though naturally aggrieved, account of his extravagances during his last visit to Scotland. Testimony (doubtless the servants') to the scenes of temper has been worked up by Moore into the picturesque passage in Chapter Two of the " Life," where Mrs. Byron's corpulence—doubtful at that period—and her vain attempts to capture and chastise her young rebel, are thrown into serio-comic contrast with the figure of the offender; " Laughing like a little Puck and mocking at all her menaces." Too much has been made of these infantile mutinies and the mother's violence, which can be paralleled in a thousand nurseries without serious prejudice either to parent or child. Later, it must be allowed, the situation became acute, and led to deplorable scenes, but even then we have Moore's admission that in Byron's " Memoranda" " the name of his mother was never mentioned without respect."

Dr. Glennie's case is more serious, for his testimony has carried weight as that of an observer at first hand. He begins by blaming Mrs. Byron for her inability to exercise much discrimination in choosing young companions for her son :

THE ABERDONIAN EPOCH

* " How, indeed, could she? Mrs. Byron was a total stranger to English society and English manners : with an exterior far from prepossessing, an understanding where nature had not been bountiful, a mind almost wholly without cultivation and the peculiarities of northern opinions, northern habits and northern accent; I trust I do no great prejudice to the memory of my countrywoman if I say that Mrs. Byron was not a Madame de Lambert endowed with powers to retrieve the fortune and form the character and manners of a young nobleman, her son."

Glennie's moment of compunction becomes him well, but he was too far gone to modify his strictures, which become him not at all. The grossness of his offence may not be apparent on the surface, but, when we look into his antecedents, it starts into its true proportions. For Glennie, Kincardineshire born and Aberdonian bred, in his every line declares himself the Anglicised Scottish snob. His sniffings at " the peculiarities of northern opinions, northern habits and northern accent " can be paralleled in the writings of his kinsman by marriage, Professor James Beattie, who said with smug satisfaction concerning his son Jamie : " After he grew up he never could endure to read what was written in any of the vulgar dialects of Scotland." It is not wonderful that when her own countryman took such an attitude towards her, Mrs. Byron, no less than her hand-maid, should have deteriorated in English surroundings.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

Whatever were her failings (and they were considerable in unbalanced and often violent temper), Mrs. Byron's memory certainly was prejudiced by Dr. Glennie's unflattering sketch of her character. He set a fashion, and in time the malignant legend gathered like the proverbial snowball, nowise diminished by Disraeli's Mrs. Cadurcis in " Venetia." Glennie had not the decency to remember and make allowance for Mrs. Byron's trials, and her brave struggle for bare existence during the first ten years of her son's life. On the narrowest means she had maintained her independence, and had given her boy the rudiments of the best Scottish education at a school that had trained great men. She had defied adversity with that gallant spirit in which her race, with all its faults, had never been lacking. A Duff in thrift, she was in courage a very Gordon. A Madame de Lambert, similarly circumstanced, could have done no more.

IV. EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS

BYRON emerges on the Aberdonian scene as a lively, turbulent little boy, halting like Mephibosheth, but, although sensitive about his infirmity, still displaying, even in infancy, that native humour and self-raillery which he retained throughout his life. Of himself and a companion in misfortune he could exclaim : " Come and see the twa laddies wi' the twa club-feet runnin' up the Broad Street." The stories that linger in the city show that in his small way he had become a public character, and his high spirit won him a reputation for " ill tricks/⁵ This brought him oddly enough into conflict with the minor authorities of Marischal College, at the very doors of which he lived during the greater part of his sojourn in Aberdeen. A foot-note of Moore's, which has escaped the notice of the most diligent collectors of Aberdeen Byroniana, tells how " the old porter¹ at the College ' minds weel ' the little boy with the red jacket and nankeen trousers whom he has so often turned out of the College courtyard." Thus, it appears, Aberdeen University did for Byron (on a less disastrous scale) precisely what Oxford did for his friend Shelley.

¹ George Pirie, a great character, and " a good servant." See P. J. Anderson, " Records of Marischal College." The red-jacketted little figure, with the long hair, recalls Madame Vigée le Bran's portrait of the young Count d'Espagnac in the Wallace Collection.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

His turbulence called early for other restraint than that of home, which latter was not the most efficient. When George was four years and ten months old, his mother saw that school was necessary. Round the corner from Broad Street, in Longacre, Mr. Bower, nicknamed "Bodsy" from his short stature, kept a mixed school of good esteem though small pretensions. Of that academy, the late Professor W. Garden Blaikie has left the best description¹: "Fancy a room like a ware-room, perhaps twenty-five or thirty feet long, low in the ceiling, with three or four small windows, ill-glazed and ill-cleaned; the walls and roof begrimed with dust, the rough, unwashed floor worn here and there into holes." Dr. Blaikie speaks of the deafening noise, but adds that the energy of the master and the fear of the tawse² produced a greater measure of progress than might have been looked for. "The dialect was the broadest, the tone of the school the roughest . . . and yet at the bottom there was a genuine kindliness and humanity."

That Mr. Bower's reputation as a disciplinarian was known to Mrs. Byron may be inferred from a passage in the biographer's rough note-book, the only relic of Moore's materials that has been preserved. This passage, not included in the "Life," records that Mrs. Byron said to Mr. Bower: "I have sent George to you that he may be *kept in about*,"³ an idiom at once very sig-

1 *Harper's Magazine*, June-Nov. 1891.

2 *Anglice*: the strap.

3 *Viz.* "kept in order," both morally and physically.

EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS

nificant of the boy's character and delightful in its Aberdonianism. But the "keeping in about" proved too much, rumour says, even for disciplinary Mr. Bower, and Byron himself tells us that he had to be removed and his "intellects consigned to a new preceptor."

Something he learned in Longacre, but not much. "I learned little except to repeat by rote the first lesson of monosyllables (God made man—Let us love Him)—by hearing it often repeated without acquiring a letter." It is just possible that on this point Byron's wonderful memory for once did not serve him so fully as it might. It is not improbable that the "God made man" quotation is really quite separate from the "Let us love Him," and would bear an interesting extension. An old lady who went to her first Dame's school in Aberdeen within a dozen years of Byron's time, used to tell the present writer that her earliest lesson, recited in a half chant, was the following pleasing jingle :

God made man
And man made money,
God made bees
And bees made honey,
God made Satan
And Satan made Sin,
God made a pit
To put Satan in.

Wherein, if indeed he learned it, may we not trace, in

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

part at least, the genesis of the Byronic theology and-demonology?

After an interval of private tuition with two excellent Marisheal College men, Mr. Ross and Mr. Paterson—the one a probationer, the other already a minister of the Kirk of Scotland—who laid the future poet under a deep and generously acknowledged obligation for intellectual stimulus received, young George, having now scraped acquaintance under Mr. Paterson's guidance with Ruddiman's Rudiments of the Latin language, was entered at the Grammar School, a place of venerable tradition, founded previous to 1256, and therefore the oldest school in the Empire. The exact date of his entry cannot now be ascertained, but it was certainly during the session 1794-95. The late Dr. Morland Simpson, Rector of the Grammar School, came to the conclusion that Byron must have entered about January 1795. The Catalogus of names of pupils at the time of his entering, if one existed, is no longer in the possession of the school, but the Catalogus which starts with the year 1796 shows him as a pupil of the second class in January of that year, being the end of the first quarter of the session which began in November 1795 and ended on October 8, 1796.¹ Byron himself stated that he "threaded all the classes to the Fourth," which implies about a year in the first class,

¹ For these particulars, the most succinct and satisfactory statement of the question hitherto given, the author is indebted to Mr. Theodore Watt, M.A., editor of "The Roll of Pupils, 1795-1919," and the leading authority on Aberdeen Grammar School history and traditions.

EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS

and consequently Dr. Morland Simpson's conclusion is, in all* likelihood, correct. Of school routine and the appearance of the old buildings, now vanished, classic descriptions have been given by Professor Garden Blaikie, by Professor David Masson,¹ and Mr. James Riddel.² Blaikie's, Masson's and Riddel's recollections are all of a later time, but Blaikie was able to draw upon the memories of his own father, who entered school at the same time as Byron, and was placed fourth in the class list in the year that Byron obtained his highest place—fifth. The descriptions hold good, however, for the earlier period, as neither buildings nor educational system had changed substantially in the thirty-six years that had elapsed between Byron's entry and Masson's. Professor Blaikie entered in 1828, and Riddel in 1825.

Of the old school, erected in 1757, Masson says with truth that it was certainly nothing to look at architecturally :

" Within a gateway and iron-railed wall, separating the school from the street, and forming a very limited playground in front, stood the low main building of a single storey, parallel with the street and having a door with stone steps in the middle and windows at the sides; and from this main building, there projected towards the street, two equally low wings, forming two junior class rooms. Two similar wings, which could not well be seen

1 " Memories of Two Cities."

2 " Aberdeen and its Folk."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

from the street, projected from the main building behind and accommodated the senior classes. • . . The arrangements inside were simple enough. Each of the four oblong class-rooms had a raised desk for the master in one angle, and two rows of 'factions,' as they were called—wooden seats with narrow sloping writing benches in front of them—along the two sides of the oblong, so as to leave a free passage of some width in the middle for the master when he chose to walk from end to end. Each faction was constructed to hold four boys; so that the look of a full class-room was that of a company of boys, seated in two parallel subdivisions of fours along the walls. In the public school, where meetings of all the classes took place for general purposes, the main desk, a wooden structure of several tiers, was in the middle of the long side of the oblong, immediately opposite the main door; and there were four sets of somewhat larger 'factions/ where the several classes sat on such occasions, all looking inwards."

Masson notes that it was not in the nature of boyish antiquarianism to go back to the times of the older heather-thatched school buildings, ancestors of those Byron knew, in which the Cargills and the Wedderburns and other early Scottish Latinists of note had walked as masters, but some of the traditions of the then existing fabric were still proverbial. " Among these traditions, by far the most fascinating was that of Lord Byron's connection with the school." Masson tells once more

EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS

.(not quite accurately) the old, pleasing story how, when the boy, just after his accession to the title, heard himself addressed for the first time at roll-call as " Domine de Byron," he could not answer " Adsum," but burst into tears and ran out. " But," adds Masson, " there are half a hundred Aberdeen myths about Byron, and this may be one of them." The Professor's caution is justifiable, but in this case needless. The story is true.¹ It was vouched for by Byron's schoolfellow, the Rev. James Smith, M.A. (King's College, 1807), schoolmaster of Glenmuick, who says that it was the first and last time that Mr. Cromar, the Rector of the Grammar School, addressed Byron as *Domine* at roll-call.

" The business of the school," Masson continues, " was Latin, Latin, Latin, . . . five hours every day save in the single vacation month of July, tipped only with a final touch of Greek; and, this course over, you were expected, at the age of from thirteen to sixteen, either to walk forward into the University, or if that prospect did not then suit you, to slip aside, a scholar so far, into the world of business."

The high days of school were the Town Council's visitation in October and the giving out of the holidays, known as the " summer's play," when the scholars made the dingy old building gay with flowers, to obtain which they laid under tribute (but after an honest fashion) the gardens of the city and its outskirts. The second October visitation during young Byron's pupilage is thus

¹ See W. Keith Leask: " *Interamna Borealis*," p. 318.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

described in *The Aberdeen Journal* of Tuesday, 1st-November, 1796 :

On Wednesday last the Grammar School of this City was visited by the Magistrates, accompanied by the Principal and Professors of Marischal College and the Town Ministers, when the scholars gave such proofs of their diligence and proficiency in their studies as were highly agreeable to the visitors and did honour to the industry and ability of the teachers. They accordingly received the thanks of the meeting, and books to the number of fifty were distributed by the Magistrates to the best scholars of the several classes.

On the same day Mr. Mather's and Mr. Bower's and Mr. Falconer's English Schools, Mr. Nicholson's French School and Mr. Duncan's for Writing, Arithmetic and Book-keeping, were also visited, in which, from the specimens exhibited at the schools, the gentlemen present were pleased to express their entire approbation of the care and attention of the several masters.

To attend extra-mural classes for other subjects than the all-imperious Latin, was, as Masson notes, a recognised part of a Grammar School boy's education, and the mention of the other schools in the newspaper report has, in at least two cases, a direct bearing on Byron's early days. Of the writing-school particularly, the poet had lively memories. " I acquired," he says, " this handwriting, which I can hardly read myself, under the fair copies of Mr. Duncan : I don't think he would plume

56

EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS

himself much upon my progress; however, I wrote much better then than I have ever done since. Haste and agitation of one kind and another have quite spoilt as pretty a scrawl as ever scratched over a frank." That Byron's youthful hand was really pretty and hardly a scrawl can be seen from the facsimile of his first letter, written on November 8th, 1798, from Newstead Abbey to his aunt, Mrs. Parker.¹ The writing, though childish, is large, fair, regular, and almost copperplate, and does sufficient credit to Mr. Duncan's tuition. It bears a modest postscript: " I hope you will excuse all blunders as it is the first letter I ever wrote."

" The Grammar School of those days," says Professor Blaikie, " was a little like Byron himself—it had a long pedigree but a short purse. The expense of sports had to be defrayed by the boys, out of their pocket money, which seldom exceeded a penny a week. . . . The games were simple but varied, following a sort of scholastic calendar, which regularly brought round marbles, buttons, hand-balls, peg-tops and what not in due season. Beyond the precincts of the School there was abundance of racing and chasing, hunting and thumping, for police were yet unknown and the streets were not too crowded to be turned into a general playground. . . . The work of the School was conducted in English, the work of the playground in broad Scotch."

Tradition tells that Byron was a good hand at marbles, and could drive one farther than most boys, and, despite

¹ See facsimile of letter in Carl Elze's " Life of Byron."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

his lameness, he also excelled at "bases." In his school work he cut no great figure, and was never one of the fortunate fifty who received prizes on Visitation Day, but his mind was very active, and, as Mr. Shortreed said of young Walter Scott, "he was makin' himsell a' the time." Receptive to all impressions, although at that period he confessed that he "hated poetry," he was absorbing material for the future. If the city of Aberdeen itself found no echo in his verse, that is not surprising, for its outward appearance was unromantic in those days; but Byron seized with sure instinct upon whatsoever made for poetry in the features of the surrounding district. Lochnagar, Morven, Culblean, Don and Dee, with their contrast of the sullen and the silvery, and, above all, "Balgounie's brig's black wall," were to him the precious memories of auld lang syne. The town, however, although unromantic in itself, was a brisk and stirring place, full of interest to the curious *genus* boy. It was the hour of wars and rumours of wars, regiments were always coming and going : Aberdeen was the centre of a strong recruiting movement and the Volunteers were in great force. Much as Byron, in manhood, hated war, he confessed that his earliest "dreams were all martial," and these may very well have been quickened by the sights and sounds of the garrison town where his consciousness first awoke. There were fine things to be seen by schoolboys, high doings on King's and Queen's birthdays, Volunteer parades in the grounds of Gordon's Hospital, next door to the
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EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS

Grammar School—and, on one Wednesday at least, at twelve 9'clock, when school would just be over, the blue-coated and white-breeched Volunteers, with their newly formed band of music, marched past the school gates to the Castlegate, the *Grande Place* of the city.¹ More was to be seen and heard there, for at one o'clock a Royal Salute was fired from the artillery barracks just round the corner, and three volleys by the Hopetoun Fencibles. The Volunteers also gave a similar performance on small arms. At these high jinks, a goodly company of Grammar boys must have assisted.

The "depressing northern town" had many other attractions besides military displays, and the occasional pageants of the Seven Incorporated Trades, as fine, in their way, as the Guild celebrations of mediaeval Nuremberg. To the theatre Byron was at least once a visitor, when he interrupted "The Taming of the Shrew" to call in question Petruchio's line :

Nay, then, I swear it is the blessed sun,

and started up from his seat with the exclamation : " But I say it is the *moon*, Sir! " Search in the files of *The Aberdeen Journal* for a possible clue to the date of this incident yielded no announcement of any performance of "The Taming of the Shrew" under that name, within the period, but an advertisement in the issue of 28th February, 1797, may give a probable indication :

¹ *Aberdeen Journal*, 25th January 1797.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

THEATRE, ABERDEEN, BY HIS MAJESTY'S-
SERVANTS

this evening, 28 February
will be performed the tragedy of

ROMEO & JULIET

The part of Romeo by Mr. Beaumont, his second
appearance in this city,
to which will be added the farce of

CATHERINE AND PETRUCHIO

Tickets to be had at the theatre where places may be
taken.

Boxes, 8s. Pit, 2s. Gallery, 1s. Doors to be open at six
o'clock and to begin at seven.

If this was indeed the actual occasion, and the alleged farce followed the tragedy, our young man must have been up pretty late for a boy just turned nine. From Moore's anecdote one would infer a rather younger child, but it is not likely that the biographer troubled about a date.

Apart, however, from the things he saw around him in Aberdeen, other and more intellectual influences were moulding young Byron. Already, although no scholar in the technical sense, he was a bookish boy, and was laying the foundations of that wide and splendid information, both classical and historical, which scholars delight to trace in his works. Mr. Ross had introduced him to the fascinations of Roman history, and he was

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BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

therefore to assume that in Aberdeen, despite her narrow circumstances, she allowed herself the society lady's necessary luxury of a library subscription. Some colour is given to this theory by Angus's Catalogue, which still exists in the Aberdeen Public Library. There we find the Gessner, a "Don Quixote" with cuts, and "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," which last had been in stock since 1765. In *The Aberdeen Journal* of 6th November, 1790, Brown, at the Homer's Head, advertises among books just arrived the "Memoirs of Baron De Tott," price 4s. in boards. The sale price does not exclude the book's being in the library, for it was usually appended to each entry in the library catalogue. This may not be proof (unfortunately, Brown's business books have vanished), but it is at least a strong presumption, and there can be no doubt that to so bookish a boy the booksellers' windows were a constant attraction and delight. It is reasonable also to suppose that Mrs. Byron, in her comparative solitude, talked much and intelligently to her boy, and that his home instruction was not wholly confined to the Bible lessons of the serving maid. His mother, as is well known, took a keen interest in public affairs and professed herself a Democrat in politics, but the actual text of her political profession has not been published hitherto. It occurs in a letter¹ to Mrs. Leigh, dated from Aberdeen, 29th November, 1792. Referring to Mrs. Leigh's invitation to accompany her to France, Mrs. Byron says :

¹ British Museum: Byron-Leigh Correspondence.

EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS

• " I wish very much to be with you, but I should **not** like to go abroad at present, in the state they are in, even if I had money to go, and I suppose you do not think of it, I am very much interested about the French, but I fancy you and I are on different sides, for I am quite a Democrat and I do not think the King, after his treachery and perjury, deserves to be restored. To be sure there has been horrid things done by the People, but if the other party had been successful, there would have been as great cruelty committed by them.

You will see by the papers the riots that has been in this country. I am told the south of Scotland is in a tumult. There has been none here yet, but it is feared there will be. In the principal towns there is societys [*sic*] of the Friends of the People as they call themselves. I suppose you have heard of the news paper that came out at Edinr, that Government wants so much to suppress. If Mr. Dundas had gone to the Perth races as he intended for he was one of the Stewarts [*sic*] he would certainly have. . . ."

At this point the rest of the letter is torn off, but the completion of the apodosis is not difficult to supply. Mrs. Byron, who, after her removal to England, was a diligent reader of *The Morning Chronicle*, could hardly have failed in Aberdeen to read *The Journal*. Search in the files of that venerable and fascinating source of local history produced ample confirmation, even to actual words, in the issue of 19th November, 1792.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

There, under date of 7th November, the Perth correspondent writes :

" This is the week of the Perth Hunt and Races. Mr. Secretary Dundas is one of the stewards. . . . A few days previous to the commencement of the hunt it was rumoured that the populace intended to burn him in effigy during his stay here, and that there were threatening letters sent to him from Perth. Verbal manifestoes in the Brunswick style were handed about to these parties :—That the people would be crushed on the first appearance of a mob :—Cut down by the Military, if they persisted, etc.

The inhabitants waited anxiously for the arrival of this Great man, some prophesying much mischief and trembling for the consequences, but to our surprise he suddenly decamped on Monday morning, having then set off for the South in obedience to an express; whether that was a political assembly or not, I will not take upon me to determine."

Follows a hugely entertaining description of how, notwithstanding Mr. Secretary's absence, the people had risen on the evening of the 6th, had paraded an effigy^c fitted up in a masterly style," and bearing on its breast the legend " Haman betrayed his enemies and I have betrayed my friends." The burning was carried out with due ceremony. The article is written with overflowing humour and many shrewd knocks at the then

EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS

tyrant of Scotland.¹ Heartsome reading, no doubt, for a lady of democratic principles; although, being an aristocrat, Mrs. Byron cannot have been altogether ill-pleased that no personal harm came to Mr. Dundas. One infers as much even from her mutilated sentence.

It is easy to see where young Byron came by his Liberalism. From his mother's newspaper-reading and talk he must have learnt much. It was the moment of the French Revolution, and the eyes of the intelligent Aberdonians were turned keenly upon events in France. Their only paper, *The Aberdeen Journal*, appearing weekly, brought them a remarkably well-edited budget of foreign intelligence. To have enlarged upon local events would have seemed a scandalous dealing in small-beer, and in those days when the " scare-head " was unknown, all that was considered important in the way of local news was collected into one rather obscure paragraph, headed " Domestic Occurrences." But the foreign intelligence and the political news from London make excellent reading. On 4th July, 1791, the good folk of Aberdeen were treated to a really admirable account of the Flight to Varennes; and next week the Capture of the French Royal Family was duly recorded with a rather bolder heading than usual. As the Revolution proceeds, all the great names of the period are, as they would say nowadays, " In the news." Danton occasionally gets a paragraph to himself, and then, as the popular movement spends its force and another and

¹ Henry Dundas, afterwards Lord Melville.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

greater figure comes upon the stage, the name of Napoleon occurs constantly, at first with something of respect, but latterly with all the abhorrence in which his name was held after he had become the bogey of every nursery in the land. Byron was rather too young to appreciate the worst of the French Revolution news, but he must have come in for the " Whiff of Grape-Shot " and the more favourable phase of Bonaparte, not yet a bogey—wherein may lie the germ of an attitude and certain notable poems.

Here is no contention that Mrs. Byron was an " intellectual "; had she been so she would not have remained so isolated in Aberdeen. No record exists that she had any " circle " in the town beyond Mary Duff's people. Her visiting was confined to friends and relatives belonging to county families. The Duffs of Fetteresso, Mr. Ferguson of Pitfour, member for the county, and the Russells of Aden practically complete the known list. Her talents and inclinations were not such as to draw her into that cultivated company of which Beattie, Campbell and Gerard were members, and which had included the greater figures of Reid and Gregory. That little Republic of Letters found room, too, for John Ewen, author of " The Boatie Rows," and Alexander Watson, the literary tailor, author of " The Kail Brose of Auld Scotland." Watson nursed a grievance against no less a person than Thomas Moore. " It is a bit of a shame," he said, " that I was not noticed in Moore's ' life of Byron ' among the acquaint-

66

EARLIEST SCHOOL-DAYS

ances of his lordship's childhood, considering that I made his lordship's first pair of breeks." Mr. Watson survived Moore's offence just two years, dying in 1831 at the age of eighty-seven.

In 1794 events in the South had foreshadowed a change of fortune for the Byrons. In that year William John Byron, George's cousin, died in Corsica, leaving George Gordon Noel—whose own father had died at Valenciennes on August 2, 1791—heir to his great-uncle, Lord Byron. Of that event, however, Mrs. Byron had no official notice. Writing to Mrs. Leigh from Broad Street, November 28, 1794, she says :

" I should have supposed you would have wrote before now to have inquired after your newpewhew [*sic*]. He is a fine boy and very well and walks and runs as well as any other child. I hear that Mrs. Parker¹ is dead and that your newpewhew Lord Byron's grandson is dead, but I have not been informed of it from any of the family. I shall be anxious until I receive a few lines informing me of your health. . . . I saw Mr. Ferguson lately. He mentioned having seen you, I think, when he was last in London. I am, dear Madam, yours affectionately,

C. BYEON."

It is noteworthy that in writing to Mrs. Leigh, Mrs. Byron never signs herself Byron Gordon.

Almost four years after this letter, an event occurred

I Byron's aunt, Charlotte Augusta Byron, wife of Vice-Admiral Christopher Parker.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

of which official information could no longer be withheld. On 19th May, 1798, the old Lord Byron died, and Hanson, the solicitor, informed Mrs. Byron of her son's succession to the titles and estates. Obscurely they had lived in Aberdeen, obscurely they departed; the date is uncertain, but it is believed to have been in the August of 1798.

From Aberdeen Byron carried away with him some rudiments of Latin, the beginnings of a wide knowledge of English and of Universal History, wits sharpened by the good-humoured rough-and-tumble of the Grammar School, and, subconscious in his mind, a sheaf of romantic impressions that he would one day consciously transmute into poetry.

V. NEW SURROUNDINGS

OF Byron's mind and character at ten years old, no Aberdeen master or schoolfellow¹ has left any detailed record. His own memories and those of his nurse, together with a few floating traditions, are the guide. It is possible to trace a lively child, mischievous, precocious in intelligence, amiable at times, and, again, the prey to strange, unchildlike passions. Under provocation he was now violent, now frozen to a dreadful outward calm—"those silent rages," as he called them—the intensity of which robbed him of expression. These are very likely connected with that "determination of blood to the brain," mentioned by Moore as a disorder common both to the poet and to his daughter Ada. The victim of such excitement finds, for the moment, that the centre of his being has, as it were, shifted. All rational restraint is suspended and his thought concentrates itself on a fictitious situation, in which he sees himself playing the *beau rôle* of a deeply injured person. Even towards those whom he loves best he may feel only an insensate fury. His thoughts are murderous, but action is, mercifully, paralysed. When the tension relaxes, and finally, sets expression free, moods like these beget every kind of inconsistency—

¹ Professor Knight,^o however, told Masson that "Byron had a damnable disposition."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

revilings of things and persons* held in deep regard; every just feeling is sacrificed to the overwhelming impulse. There is a complete temporary lack of continuity, and, to say that, is merely to say that the symptom is one of insanity. The reaction brings a generous repentance, accompanied by self-recriminations¹ of the most poignant kind, and the *amende* is made with an amiability that wins easy forgiveness. More important, it restores in the transgressor his own self-esteem, but at so light a price that the regret brings no chastening.

This curious mentality must have further isolated from his schoolfellows a boy already sufficiently isolated by circumstance, and it may account for those odd phrases of description which linger in local northern tradition; for example : " Mrs. Byron's crookit deevil," " A verra takkin' laddie, but ill to guide." The revulsion from fury to generous reparation is illustrated by a well-authenticated story. Having thrown a stone at a bird, but missed, and accidentally injured a little girl, he remained at first impenitent and treated the child's angry nurse with amazing if unconvincing arrogance, saying : " Do you know I'm Byron's son ? "² An hour later he called to enquire for his victim and presented a bag of sweets as a peace offering.

Other characteristics made him a boy apart. If he is correctly reported, his speech, under stress of emotion,

1 Cf. Byron's tears on entering his wife's room after her flight.

2 See Rogerson: " The Book of Powis " (Aberdeen, 1906).

NEW SURROUNDINGS

•became pointedly epigrammatic and more rhetorical than the ordinary talk of schoolboys. This must have been the result of his wide reading in serious books. On the day when he succeeded to the title it is said that he treated a group of Grammar boys, curious to know how he came by it, to the following flourish : " Well, it was not of my doing. Fortune had me whipped yesterday because another boy had done what he ought not, and to-day she makes me a lord because another man has done yesterday what he could not help. I need not thank her in either case, for I never asked anything at her hand."

There is no evidence that Fortune's stroke caused even a ripple of excitement in Aberdeen. Some gossip there may have been, but in those days the public Press did not condescend to minor personalities, and the files of *The Aberdeen Journal* give no hint of a Grammar School boy suddenly transformed into a peer. There is an advertisement about this time of a sale of furniture " belonging to a person who has left the country," and another of " Genteel Lodgings to let in Broad Street," with a description that might answer to the flat at No. 64. But beyond these rather problematic notices, silence. They are, however, the only advertisements of the kind within the period.

For the journey to the south, a private travelling carriage would be beyond Mrs. Byron's means. In all probability she booked places for the Aberdeen and Edinburgh Fly, which set off regularly from the former

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

city every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at four o'clock in the morning, arrived at Perth the same evening, and went on to the capital next day, arriving in time for dinner. " Travellers," says *The Journal* advertisement, " have by this means a very comfortable night's rest at Perth in the course of their journey." This indication of the travellers' route is amplified by Byron's own memories, which give a glimpse of mother and son passing Loch Leven. As they passed, Mrs. Byron told George the story of Queen Mary's escape, and took care to remind him of the Gight Gordons' descent from the Stuarts. Relating this incident in 1820, in a letter to Murray, Byron fell into serious mistakes on points of historical detail, erroneously connecting one of his ancestors with Mary's adventures. These he corrected in a later letter, gallantly exonerating his mother, and adding : " She was more accurate than I am, being precise upon points of genealogy, like all the aristocratical Scotch."

The story of the arrival at Newstead is almost too familiar to bear repetition, except for its reflection of Mrs. Byron's dramatising instinct and that sense of self-esteem which she transmitted to her son. Wishing to be assured from the lips of others of her own and her son's new dignity, she asked at the Newstead toll-bar whether there was not a nobleman's estate near—and whose was it. " It was Lord Byron's, but he is dead." " And who is the heir now ? " " They say it's a little boy that lives at Aberdeen." " This is him, God bless him,"

NEW SURROUNDINGS

said May Gray, turning to the child and kissing him,¹

The tremendous change of fortune and surroundings would test the most steadfast spirits : to the unstable temperaments of mother and son it must have been an overwhelming experience. It flattered Mrs. Byron's pride of race, and promised her some compensation for years of disappointment and frustration. Although her son had come into a sadly wrecked and encumbered inheritance, and money troubles were to pursue her to the end, she must have built castles in the air, and painted the future in rosy tints. The Duff strain in her blood had suggested retrenchment and thrifty management during her boy's long minority, and her proud Gordon heart cherished hopes of seeing Byron established, at one and twenty, in a restored Newstead, of which he would prove a worthy lord. The reflected glory to herself would not be inconsiderable, and the mere romantic adventure of it all would attract a woman to whose forebears adventure had been the very breath of life. In the north she had defied adversity, and had won through by care and frugal living : here in the south, with a promise, at least, of ampler means, a wider opportunity and an assured rank, the adventure of the last eight years was to be repeated on a larger scale and with a seeming

1 Quoted from Moore's rough notebook, where the version is rather better and obviously less dressed-up than in the "Life." There Moore corrects May Gray's ungrammatical "him" to "he," but "him" more truly represents her vernacular. Almost certainly, also, she said "blessings on him," in true Aberdonian fashion, not the English "bless him."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

greater certainty of reward. If her head was a little turned, small wonder. She was not equal to the task, which was to bring her only bitter disillusion; but in any estimate of her character and conduct during the years that remained to her, her hopes and her disappointments must carry full weight.

On Byron himself, with his finer susceptibilities and livelier imagination, the change from Broad Street to Newstead wrought even more powerfully. It must have seemed like one of his favourite Eastern tales. There is a tradition¹ that already he knew "The Arabian Nights," with a story from which he had once entertained a band of schoolfellows overtaken by a sudden, blinding snow-storm on their way from the Grammar School to Mr. Duncan's writing school, and forced to take shelter until evening in a hospitable tradesman's shop.

Newstead within doors, it is true, had few splendours to offer, for it was sadly neglected and dilapidated, thanks to the old lord's malignant acts; but outwardly it was a lordly house, and its fragment of crumbling but still lovely Gothic, the ruins of the Abbey Church flank-

1 See the *Athenaeum*, Nov. 9, 1861, where the story is vouched for by one of Byron's schoolfellows who was present on the occasion. But his evidence came so long after the event, and is so like a similar anecdote of Walter Scott's boyhood—as regards the story-telling, at least—that one suspects the influence of the mythopoeic faculty yet once more. The boys' being caught in a storm so sudden and severe that they could not proceed is, however, quite **probable**, and during the winter of 1796, on December 6, a sudden **blizzard and** hurricane made the streets impassable (see the *Aberdeen Journal*, December 7, 1796).

NEW SURROUNDINGS

ing the main building, lent it a touch of the mediaeval and the. ghostly, as well as sufficient remnant of pride to stir the heart of a poet-to-be. If he was conscious before that he was "Byron's son," the sight of Newstead and the knowledge that it was his own gave that consciousness a reality which, in a creature of Byron's temperament, awoke strange, unchildish and dizzying emotions. As yet the poet was inarticulate, and the poetic impulse slumbering, or, if stirring dimly, fiercely resisted even to hatred; but it was there, and within five years "the hall of my fathers" was to inspire Byron to one of his earliest efforts in verse, the keynotes of which are pride of ancestry and intense feeling for the beauty of his home, even in decay. He has left no Confession of his first emotions on seeing Newstead, but his early poem and its more elaborate successors leave us in little doubt as to their nature, conscious or subconscious. He was an old-fashioned, sententious little boy, whose recorded sayings, authentic and traditional, proclaim the influence of much reading and the talk of grown-up people. That he took himself seriously just after his coming to England is shown by the phrasing of a letter dated 13th March 1799.¹ Solemnly advising his mother to engage a tutor for him, he says: "I recommend this to you because, if some plan of this kind is not adopted, I shall be called, or rather branded with the name of a dunce, which you know I could never bear." Comical in its young gravity, this, and another

¹ See Prothero: "Letters and Journals," Vol. I.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

example of how large a part self-esteem played in his make-up. Unfortunately for himself, he was not always so prudent, and the recklessness of his blood was to wound that esteem and the young man, to his hurt. With that wounding came *dtbdcle*—not, however, wholly irretrievable; and in the struggle to win back self-esteem and the esteem of the world lies the root-motive of Byron's last phase.

With these characteristics was bound up an inveterate shyness, which pursued him through life, and proved another of his many handicaps. Although he seemed a bold and, under provocation, a defiant fellow, sufficient to himself and regardless of the world, that was too often only the mask of a torturing diffidence, arising from a perverted and unhealthy repression of self-conscious pride. For the greater part of his career he was out of his element : it would be difficult, indeed, to say when he was in his proper element or that he ever found it, except perhaps when he was alone with Nature. The mood of

Place me on Sunium's marbled steep

reflects the very essence of the Byronic melancholy, and its inevitable end :

There, swanlike, let me sing and die.

Something of pose there may have been in that attitude, in its more obvious manifestations to the world of a dark, possessed and haunted figure, but in the last stanza

NEW SURROUNDINGS

of " The Isles of Greece " Byron gave symbolical and almost prophetic expression to the brooding and solitary genius that ruled his life.

Of another passion, disastrous and precocious—although, at its earliest appearance, untouched with any grosser element, yet even then sharp to wound as the love of maturer years—there will be something to say later in the discussion of Byron's " dependence on and perpetual mental reference to womankind." Much of that can be accounted for by the fact that he was brought up by women, and that in such home life as he knew during the first ten and most impressionable years there was no masculine control. The influence of private tutors and day-school masters is not the same as that of a father, for the loss of which nothing can compensate to a growing boy, condemned to see all things about him subservient to feminine will and regarded from the feminine point of view. Even his first English school was no help in this respect, for there the maternal influence followed him and over-rode the master's.

This was the singularly gifted, ardent, difficult and complex, yet strangely simple, nature that now passed into the hands of English tutors and governors.

VI. THE HARROW BOY

OF formal education Byron carried away with him from Scotland comparatively little. Such Latin as he already possessed was probably pretty thoroughly drilled in, although it could not have amounted to much. Considering that he entered the Grammar School below the average age and not at all well prepared, he did not badly, for his regular "removes"—to adopt the technical term of the south—show that he managed, at least, to keep up with his class. Only once, however, did he get as high as fifth, unless when his waggish master turned the class upside-down—a process which usually brought George to the top, and throws an unflattering light upon his customary place. That he was not by merit raised to that good eminence, his master used to emphasise with the remark : " Now, George, man, let's see how soon you'll be at the bottom again." This form of moral pillory, although really intended to give the backward a chance and arouse effort to stay aloft, probably awoke only resentment in a boy like Byron, and had no good effect. Tradition says that for him it was invariably a case of *facilis descensus*. He has left no reminiscence, good or bad, of any Grammar School master. He had but one, for the teacher with whom a class began on

78

THE HARROW BOY

entering school carried that class on through all successive removes until the boys left for the University or business. To Mr. Ross, his private tutor, Byron was warmly attached, and to him he owed his enthusiasm for Roman history. That interest (which he never lost), his small stock of Latin, and the ability to write a careful round hand, made up the sum-total of Byron's purely scholastic attainments when he passed into the hands of Dummer Rogers, his tutor at Nottingham, the person he so solemnly exhorted his mother to engage in order that her son might not be branded as a dunce.

Rogers liked his pupil, with whom he read Virgil and Cicero, finding him fairly proficient for his age. The lessons often took place when Byron was suffering great pain from the appliances fitted to his foot by the quack, Lavender; and when the tutor on one occasion sympathised, the boy made him a Spartan reply. Rogers enjoyed, too, the shrewdness with which his pupil saw through Lavender's absurd pretensions to learning, and, by setting a booby-trap, exposed the quack's ignorance. In Rogers, Byron found one of the real friends of his boyhood, and he never forgot him.

Finding that Lavender's treatment did no good, Mrs. Byron decided to remove to London, where, by the advice of Byron's guardian, Lord Carlisle, she placed her son under the care of Dr. Baillie. At the same time she entered him at Dr. Glennie's school at Dulwich. Glennie's account of Byron reads like an epitaph:

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

"I found him enter upon his tasks with alacrity and success. He was playful, good-humoured and beloved by his companions. His reading in history and in poetry was far beyond the usual standards of his age, and in my study he found many books open to him, both to please his taste and gratify his curiosity."

Dr. Glennie goes on with his eulogy in a strain that suggests almost rapt admiration of his noble pupil, respect for whose nobility seems to have coloured the certificate of ability. The Dulwich pedagogue does not spare the butter, which he lays on with a lavishness little associated—either literally or metaphorically—with Headmasters of Private Academies for Young Gentlemen. If Glennie betrayed his admiration to his pupil, he must have delivered himself into the hands of the boy who had seen through Lavender, and it looks as if in reality the Doctor had subjected himself to a little irresistible leg-pulling.

The panegyric continues the tale of books read by young Byron :

" Among others a set of our poets from Chaucer to Churchill, which I am almost tempted to say he had more than once perused from beginning to end. He showed at this age an intimate acquaintance with the historical parts of Holy Scripture, upon which he seemed delighted to converse with me, especially after our religious exercises of a Sunday evening; when he would reason upon the facts contained in the Sacred Volume

80

THE HARROW BOY

with every appearance of belief in the divine truths which they unfold."

" Almost tempted to say he had more than once perused " looks like the phrase of a sycophant anxious to make out a good case at all costs. Glennie, to do him justice, had a motive : he was writing in self-defence, with a rankling memory of reproaches " for not having made a better boy " of Byron. That memory lurks beneath the concluding passage of his estimate :

" That the impressions thus imbibed in his boyhood had, notwithstanding the irregularities of his after life, sunk deep into his mind, will appear, I think, to every impartial reader of his works; and I have never been able to divest myself of the persuasion that, in the strange aberrations which so unfortunately marked his subsequent career, he must have found it difficult to violate the better principles early instilled into him."

In his last conclusion Glennie is undeniably correct, but he is writing more with an eye to his own credit than to Byron's. He would fain lay to his wounded soul what flattering unction he can. His whole experience of his pupil was disappointing. Mrs. Byron proved an intractable parent, and with her the Doctor was soon at open war. The joy and magnificent advertisement of having a young peer of the realm on the roll of his suburban academy had been sadly dashed, and at length, in 1801, Byron had to be removed to Harrow, " as little

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

prepared," says Glennie, " as it is natural to suppose from two years of elementary instruction, thwarted by every art that could estrange the mind of youth from preceptor, from school, and from all serious study."

The aggrieved man lays the whole blame at Mrs. Byron's door. That she was difficult and injudicious is beyond doubt; but matters could not have been improved by Glennie's all-too-plain attitude of contempt (already noted) for the lady's " peculiarities of northern opinions, northern habits, and northern accent." Trust a woman to detect such a feeling in a compatriot; and after that, the deluge ! It may have been more than the alleged lack of progress that made Mrs. Byron anxious to remove her son and have him at home oftener on Saturday than the master approved, and led her to make deplorable scenes at the school itself—scenes that the venerable Principal does not minimise. In writing of these, Glennie betrays once more his veneration for his pupil's sagacity, and that, too, on a subject about which a wise master would have held his tongue. With a portentous solemnity he related—and Moore takes care to improve the occasion—how he had once the pain of overhearing a school-fellow of his noble pupil say: " Byron, your mother is a fool "; to which the other gloomily answered : " I know it." Anyone with the least understanding of the schoolboy mind at twelve years old, and even older, would have attached no great importance to the deliverance. These unconscious betrayals of the pedagogic mind indicate sufficiently that

THE HARROW BOY

Clennie—who, equally with Dr. Butler of Harrow, might have sat for " Pomposus "—was scarcely the man to guide this exceptionally difficult boy. This conclusion need not be coloured by Byron's own saying that his Dulwich school was " a damned place," for he was very fond of bestowing labels of that sort, and the condemnation has a parallel in the case of Harrow, which he first " hated," but afterwards liked. Southwell, too, he was always reviling when in a censorious mood; but even there he contrived to find a good deal of enjoyment in his friendship with the Pigots. This tendency is only another instance of that instability which is a commonplace of his character, and which makes it dangerous to draw any safe conclusion from anything he said in his moods of petulance. In the lives of few men has it been harder to draw

, • • the accompts of Evil,

and critics of the poet have been rather too much inclined

to find a deuced balance with the Devil.¹

Of late, however, that balance has been considerably reduced, and the problem is to strike the mean of justice. Even within the last two years an eminent literary man, whose opinion is not negligible, endorsed as final Macaulay's judgment on Byron : "A bad fellow, and

1 " Don Juan," I, 167.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

horribly **affected.**" It should be remembered, however, that in his review of Moore's " Life " Macaulay's tone is less uncompromisingly harsh, and that the words here quoted are an entry in a diary, not primarily intended for the ear of the world, and even then the context is palliative : " Poor fellow! . . . Had I, at twenty four, had a peerage and been the most popular poet and the most successful Lovelace of the day, I should have been as great a coxcomb, and, possibly, as bad a man." Plainly Macaulay is here not writing for publication, otherwise he would not have exposed himself to the inference that he himself might have been the most successful Lovelace of the day without being necessarily as bad a man. Great were the emancipatory virtues of Clapham, and they might " possibly " have accomplished even that.

The Dulwich experiment, then, was frankly a failure; and the influences of Harrow, although not without their brighter aspect, were scarcely corrective. Byron was now approaching the perilous years of adolescence, the years when character is in the melting-pot, when a chance word or a chance impression can change entirely the form of the ultimate cast; and—to continue the simile—at the age of thirteen he was thrown into the crucible of an English public school, to be made or marred. The future poet was strangely unlike the general ruck of new boys : he had a fund of knowledge, the product of early reading, unusual in one of his years; but there were, on the contrary, gaps in his experience

84

THE HARROW BOY

born of a lonely and fatherless home-life. He came to the Hill'in some ways already an educated man, in others a very small boy. It is no disparagement to the public school system to say that it failed to tame a nature which was, of all natures, the most fiery and untamable. Desirable as may be a monastic routine for the average boy, undoubtedly successful though its results are for the majority, there are occasions when it falls far short of the ideal. Byron was one of these exceptions. A normal boy, accustomed to a father's authority, accepts unquestionably the theory *in loco parentis*, and obeys the master's arbitrary rules and restrictions without hesitation, knowing that disobedience will bring physical pain. But take an intelligent and imaginative boy, one who is in the habit of thinking for himself and unused, moreover, to any control more strict than that of a weak and affectionate woman, hedge him about with regulations which he can see at once to be meaningless and tiresome to himself, and immediately he will set his wits to work to circumvent the boundaries of his liberty. The beginnings are small, but if the early offences go unchecked the offender finds the hoodwinking of authority so easy and pleasantly adventurous that he is apt, by the time he reaches manhood, to become a completely non-moral person.

In Dr. Joseph Drury, his headmaster at Harrow, Byron was certainly fortunate. For the first time in his life he had met with one who thoroughly understood him, who seemed to envisage his character at a glance,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

and who had **at** once the tact and penetration to see exactly what treatment would be most judicious. Notwithstanding—perhaps in consequence of—the experience of Dr. Glennie's, Byron was little different from the boy who had left Aberdeen. Drury saw him as a wild mountain colt, but he had been prepared for the boy's ability by the solicitor Hanson, who had said that there was "a cleverness about him." Drury took an early opportunity of summoning his charge to a private interview, at which he tried to draw him out by enquiries as to his former amusements, employments and associates. He did not succeed—Byron must have been in one of his stubborn moods. But, says Drury, in one of the best remarks ever made about the future poet, "there was mind in his eye"; and later, in an interview with Lord Carlisle, Byron's guardian, who was extremely sceptical about the boy's character and attainments, Drury said: "He has talents, my lord, which will add lustre to his rank"—a remark which drew from Carlisle merely a supercilious "Indeed!"

To the end Byron remained rather a handful to his headmaster, but for Drury he had always the greatest regard and affection, even after necessary interludes of discipline. At a later period he wrote to his sister:¹ "You must know, sister of mine, that I am the most unlucky wight in Harrow, perhaps in Christendom, and am no sooner out of one scrape than into another, and to-day, this very morning, I had a thundering Jobation

1 Prothero: "Letters and Journals," Vol. I.

THE HARROW BOY

from our Good Doctor which deranged my nervous system,, for at least five minutes, but notwithstanding He and I now and then disagree, yet upon the whole we are very good friends, for there is so much of the Gentleman, so much mildness and nothing of pedantry in his character that I cannot help liking him, and will remember his instructions with gratitude as long as I live. He leaves Harrow soon, *apropos*, so do I. This quitting will be a considerable loss to the school. He is the best master we ever had, and at the same time respected and feared; greatly will he be regretted by all who know him." And again he says, " What little I have learnt I owe to him alone, nor is it his fault that it was not more."¹

By his own account, Byron was " at first a most unpopular boy, but led latterly/" It was not to be expected that he should be popular; his uncertain temper, his shyness, his painful consciousness of his physical affliction, his non-scholastic erudition—of little use in Form work, but rendering him unboyishly precocious in conversation, outlook on life and judgment of the world—did not recommend him to his companions. A contemporary, Sir Thomas Bernard,² who shared the same bedroom, spoke of Byron as " a terrible bully "; but against that must be put the many anecdotes of generous conduct—how he asked to be allowed to take part of Peel's licking, and how he begged Wildman not

¹ Prothero, *op. cit.*

² See Minchin: " Old Harrow Days."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

to lick De La Warr. On being asked why, he replied, with a peculiarly Byronic evasion : " I don't know, except that he is a brother peer." Another anecdote recalled by Thomas Dundas, first Earl of Zetland, gives a serio-comic contradiction both to the reason and to the charge of bullying. One day, when Byron caught Lord Herbert bullying Dundas, he said : " I like licking a lord's son "; and straightway gave Herbert a thrashing. So far from being himself a bully, he appears oftener in the character of protector of weaker boys. To his friend, young Harness—lame like himself—he said : " Harness, if anyone bullies you, tell me, and I'll thrash him if I can." In his position as monitor he exercised discipline on others, and he would on occasion even lick a boy in order to compel that boy to take the offensive against bullies. This was a recognised part of school routine. Mr. Minchin, in his " Old Harrow Days," further recalls that the great cure for bullying was the school milling-ground, which was legitimised by Dr. Parr, who appointed that " mills " should take place on a spot which he could see from his study window. " The boy," says Mr. Minchin, " who submitted tamely to be bullied, deserved, in the opinion of his fellows, all that he could get. He had only to challenge his bully to fight in the School milling ground—he would probably be licked . . . but, vanquished or conqueror, he would walk from—or more probably was carried from—that milling ground a free man. No one would ever bully him again,"

THE HARROW ROY

• From these instances, both pro and con, and the reflections of Harrow ways, one can arrive at something very near the truth about Byron's conduct on this score. When his darker demon had the upper hand he may very well have merited Bernard's description; but this is more than atoned for by the many circumstantial accounts of his championing defenceless boys, even to willingness to submit to torture without retaliation, as in the Peel incident.

Although, according to his own story, Byron never knew his lesson, that statement—like all his self-accusations—must be taken with a considerable grain of salt, and even his very next words are a characteristic qualification. Moore, not a very competent judge, makes too much of certain evidences of backwardness. He thinks that because Byron's school books are scribbled over with clumsy interlined translations of the most ordinary Greek words, this is proof of narrow classical attainments. To found any just conclusion on this commonplace schoolboy practice, it would be necessary to know the exact period at which the marks were made. Of this Moore says nothing, and as he himself quoted the Greek words underlined without troubling to put on the accents—the absence of which is always the mark of a slovenly scholar—the indictment is merely a case of Satan reproving sin.

This is not to say that Byron was the fine flower of Harrovian scholarship. He certainly did not come anywhere near that accomplishment, for he himself confesses

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

that he wrote his Latin and Greek hexameters " with such prosody as it pleased God." But his place in the school was much better than Moore would lead one to infer. The biographer does not, indeed, seem to have made very minute enquiries into the existing evidence on this point. It is contained in the 1808 and 1805 Bill-books.¹ In the former, Byron's name occurs as top of the Fifth Form, and in the latter as a monitor and third boy in the school. In 1804, writing to Augusta, Byron says that De La Warr " is at present very low in the School, not owing to his want of ability, but to his years. I am nearly at the top of it; by the rules of our Seminary he is under my power, but he is too good natured ever to offend me and I like him too well ever to exert my authority over him."² If that betray a weakness or favouritism, it is, at least, a glimpse of a more amiable Byron.

It was not in the classroom, however, but in his private studies, that Byron made the best use of his time at Harrow. He extended the habit of voracious reading which he had formed between the ages of five and ten. " I was never seen reading, but always idle and in mischief or at play. The truth is that I read eating, read in bed, read when no one else read, and had read all sorts of reading since I was five years old."³ Yet, curiously enough, until he was eighteen he had never

1 See Minchin, op. cit.

2 Prothero: " Letters and Journals," Vol. I.

3 Moore.

THE HARROW BOY

seen a Review, nor did he know what that periodical was, and on hearing one mentioned raised a laugh by asking Curzon " What is a Review ? " More sophisticated young men imagined that his wide general information could only be derived from the Reviews, but as a matter of fact it was first-hand. His chief distinction at school was in declamation, by his proficiency in which he impressed Drury far more than by his earliest exercise in English verse, a translation from a Chorus of the " Prometheus " of JSsehylus, which was received by the headmaster " but coolly." " No one," said Byron at a later date, referring to this incident, " had the least notion that I should subside into poetry." (Is the last phrase, by any chance, the inspiration of Mr. Wegg's immortal saying?)

Regarding his attainments Byron had a fairly just estimate, apparent in the contrast he drew between himself and Peel: "As a scholar he was greatly my superior, as a declaimer and actor I was reckoned at least his equal; as a schoolboy, *out of school*, I was always *in scrapes*, and he never; and *in school* he always knew his lesson, and I rarely,—but when I knew it, I knew it nearly as well. In general information, History etc. etc. I think I was *his* superior as well as of most boys of my standing."¹

To Byron at this period might have been applied Gibbon's famous description of himself at the age of fifteen : " With a stock of erudition which might have

1 Moore.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

puzzled a doctor and a degree of ignorance of which a schoolboy might have been ashamed."

His turbulence, in cooler moments, cost him that regret and drew forth that frank acknowledgment of contrition which characterised him through life. Before he left he was to lose Dr. Drury and to fling himself into fierce opposition to the new headmaster, Dr. Butler; but even towards Butler he relented. "I have retained," he said, "many of my school friendships, and all my dislikes, except to Dr Butler, whom I treated rebelliously and have been sorry ever since. Dr Drury whom I plagued sufficiently too, was the best and kindest—and yet strict too—friend I ever had—and I look upon him still as a father."

Beneath the bickerings of school life—which are, after all, only superficial—there lay a Byron more difficult to discover, but still discoverable by careful study of detached indications. There is that curious note on the fly-leaf of his "*Scriptores Graeci*" which betrays the *ennui* of the school hour, the wandering attention and the egotistical turning inwards upon himself: "George Gordon Byron, Wednesday, June 26th, A.D. 1805, three-quarters of an hour past three o'clock in the afternoon, third School,—Calvert, Monitor: Tom Wildman on my left hand, and Long on my right. Harrow on the Hill." The note is true to type, and is characteristic of the genius that was afterwards to end the most serious and even sublime stanza with a sudden descent to a whimsical jest. And yet it was poetic imagination which

93

THE HAREOW BOY

recognised that, while Wildman was on the left and Long on the right, Harrow—a larger image—was on the Hill.

Four years later, looking at that leaf, he added a further note : " Eheu fugaces, Posthume, Posthume! Labuntur anni, B. January 9th, 1809.—Of the four persons whose names are here mentioned, one is dead, another in a distant climate, all separated, and not five years have elapsed since they sat together in School, and none are yet twenty-one years of age."

The note reflects those passionate friendships with Clare, De La Warr, Dorset and Wingfield which brought Byron the schoolboy so large a measure of pleasure and of pain. The suffering that is born of passion he had known from his earliest years, and it had developed with a strange precocity even at a time when he hardly knew what it was that had so disturbed him.

At Harrow, as he advanced towards adolescence, came a fuller understanding and a power of self-analysis. The usual special information of public schools, which Stevenson in " The Lantern Bearers " calls " conversation on inappropriate subjects," had now become familiar, and there are traces, curiously significant in the light of what was to follow, of an unedifying interest in reading very much outside the school curriculum, and less likely to meet with official approval, as the larger part of Byron's private reading. Harrow found a sly and illicit delight in the poems of " Thomas Little,"¹ which are responsible to no small degree for certain

I i.e. Thomas Moore.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

tendencies which had later sinister developments. It was a strange stroke of fate that long afterwards was to bring " Thomas Little " into the closest intimacy with Byron and appoint him his biographer. Neither as writer nor as man was Thomas Moore an ideal companion for Byron. His empty and doubtful early verses gave the boy's character an unwholesome twist and stimulated unhealthy curiosity, possibly, also, a desire of imitation; and Moore himself, with his " My Noble Friend," " The Noble Poet," and his obsequious " My Lord " (which Byron entreated him to omit in their correspondence) was too flimsy a character to be any real help to a wayward genius.

Throughout the Harrow period, Byron drifted steadily further and further away from his mother. The wilful superciliousness of a clever boy in his teens, determined to take his own way at all costs, his sharp tongue and his self-sufficiency, acerbated the precarious relations of mother and son, and led to deplorable scenes. Mrs. Byron, unwise, irascible, and changeable at the best, was not the woman to throw oil upon the troubled waters, and her state must have been made the less gracious by a growing apprehension that the boy upon whom she had built so many hopes was likely to disappoint her. This, a bitter trial to any mother, could have on a character like Mrs. Byron's no chastening effect. The evidence of steady deterioration is not far to seek. Her son supplies it.

During 1804—his fourth year at Harrow—Byron was

THE HARROW BOY

beginning to find himself as a letter-writer and to give promise of that mastery of the personal epistolary style which has given his correspondence an importance equal to that of his poetry. He was a young man with a grievance, rather sorry for himself; his eye was pretty well filled with the suffering figure of George Gordon Noel, Lord Byron, and, being an imaginative person, he found it congenial to set down that figure on paper. Some outlet was necessary, and he had found a sympathetic listener. His half-sister, the Hon. Augusta Byron, had loved him from the first moment they met. He was her "Baby Byron," and she idolised him as great girls idolise pretty little boys, often not dreaming what havoc they work. In 1804, Augusta was of marriageable age—was, in fact, about to be married to her cousin, Colonel Leigh; and George, a particularly good-looking and fascinating—if a little too fat—Harrow boy, had more than ever a share in his sister's affection and good graces. To Augusta, then, he poured out his troubles, painting Mamma in very undutiful and unlovely colours, when his mood so drove him. He knew he was secure of a hearing, for a step-daughter is not usually disinclined to hear ill of a step-mother. Mrs. Byron not only disapproved of Augusta's projected marriage, but also looked askance—for reasons best known to herself—at George's devotion to his sister. Byron's sly calculation of his audience is an unpleasing trait in his character and a symptom of depravity. It flattered and fed the resentment. Of that he **was** conscious with a sort of

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

perverted voluptuousness. Many of the letters betray the mood of the old " silent rages " now grown articulate, but as far removed as ever from reason. Again it is a case of the shifting of the writer's mentality to a plane largely fictitious. Once he takes his pen in hand to pour out his distresses, there is no measure to his dressing-up of the picture; and the more he dresses it up, the more he enjoys himself. It is a minor gratification of revenge—revenge at second hand, no doubt, but still gratifying.

His better self, however, is not wholly extinguished. In so variable a temperament as Byron's the moment of relenting and return to justice is inevitable, and in these passages of the letters to Augusta lies valuable evidence of the truth about the relations between Mrs. Byron and her son at this period. It is possible to fix a point at which a more serious break occurs, and to recognise that up to that point the state of things had been better than is commonly assumed. The first virulent outburst occurred on August 18, when he speaks of his " tormentor, whose *diabolical* disposition, (pardon me for staining my paper with so harsh a word) seems to increase with age and to acquire new force with time."¹ On October 25th he is more conciliatory : " I a m sorry to say the old lady and myself don't agree like lambs in a meadow, but I believe it is all my own fault, I am rather too fidgety, which my precise mama objects to,

1 These and the quotations immediately following are from Prothero: " Letters and Journals/" by Mr. Murray's permission,

THE HARROW BOY

we differ, then argue, and to my shame be it spoken, fall out a little, however after the storm comes a calm," On November 2nd he writes : " My mother has lately behaved to me in such an eccentric manner that so far from feeling the affection of a son it is with difficulty that I can restrain my dislike, . . . In former days she spoilt me; now she is altered to the contrary; for the most trifling thing she upbraids me in a most outrageous manner." On 11th November he says : " When she has occasion to lecture me (not very seldom you will think, no doubt) she does not do it in a manner that commands respect and in an impressive style. No! did she do that I should amend my faults with pleasure and dread to offend a kind though just mother. But she flies into a fit of phrenzy, upbraids me as if I was the most undutiful wretch in existence, rakes up the ashes of my *father*, abuses him, says I shall be a true Byrrone which is the worst epithet she can invent. Am I to call this woman mother? . . . I owe her respect as a Son, But I renounce her as a Friend." His letter of November 17th repudiates the idea of complete separation, which Augusta had advocated in a letter to Hanson, but he would like " not to be so much with her as I hitherto have been, for I do believe she likes me; she manifests that in many instances, particularly with regard to money which I never want and have as much as I desire. But her conduct is so strange, her caprices so impossible to be complied with, her passions so outrageous that the evil quite overbalances her *agreeable*

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

qualities. . . . My whole family from the Conquest are upbraided! myself abused, and I am told that what little accomplishments I possess either in mind or body are derived from *her alone*." On 23rd April 1805, after much rhetorical invective, he concludes : " Such, Augusta, Such is my mother; *my mother!* I disclaim her from this time, and although I cannot help treating her with respect, I cannot reverence as I ought to do that parent who, by her outrageous conduct, forfeits all title to filial affection. To you, Augusta, I must look up as my nearest relation, to you I must confide what I cannot mention to others, and I am sure you will pity me; but I entreat you to keep this a secret nor expose that unhappy failing of this woman, which I must bear with patience." From Harrow on June 5th he tells Augusta that his mother is certainly mad : " Her conduct is a happy compound of Derangement and folly." A letter of Mrs. Byron's to Augusta, which unwisely she had shown to George, had given what Byron pleases to call " the finishing stroke to filial which must now give way to fraternal duty. Believe me dearest Augusta, not ten thousand such mothers, or indeed any mothers, could induce me to give you up."

The indications of a change in Mrs. Byron are unmistakable, although in the letters the representation of that change is largely an unconscious reflection of her son's own perversity and wilfulness. But when he tries to do her justice, and even goes so far as to blame himself for the scenes* he leaves us ia little doubt that, until he strained

98

THE HARROW BOY

her patience to the breaking-point, she had endured his tantrums with an all-too-fond indulgence. It is to this period, plainly, that the personal upbraidings and the bitter reproaches usually associated with his earlier childhood should be referred. It must have seemed to her that all her world was breaking up. Thwarted at every turn, baulked of every fond expectation, small wonder that she lost heart and found no better weapon of defence than petulant recrimination.

The later letters to Augusta show how thoroughly Byron renounced the filial relation. The correspondence is a young rake's-progress in satirical invective. He alarmed Augusta sufficiently to induce her to write to Hanson, but the only cure she could suggest was separation of mother and son. It does not appear that she, who alone had the power, did anything effective to discourage these epistles. So much were the pair hand-and-glove that Byron could write to his half-sister, evidently with good hope of her acquiescence, begging her to connive at his deception when he had written to his mother a lying letter saying that his holidays began on the sixth of August instead of July first, in order that Mrs. Byron might not come to town on the latter date and so make it impossible for the young man to call on his sister.

By this time the rough northern colt had taken on considerable polish. He had not yet, to use his own phrase, graduated in vice—a promotion which he refers definitely to his early days at Cambridge; but he was

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

rapidly acquiring the arts of a young man of the world*, in the limited degree possible to a schoolboy of seventeen. He betrays himself deliciously in his letter reminding Augusta that ". . . Thursday is our Speech Day at Harrow . . . I don't know how you are to come, but for *Godssake* bring as few women with you as possible." He wishes to know immediately whether she will drive over or not, " and I will arrange my other engagements accordingly." Then, as ever, he reverts to the mock dramatic affectation, and qualifies his conceit with a touch of sub-satirical humour : " I beg, Madam, you may make your appearance in one of his Lordship's most dashing carriages, as our Harrow ettiquette admits of nothing but the most superb vehicles on Our Grand Festivals."

Byron at this period appears as a creature tossed about on the sea of his fast-developing passions. The contradictions and puzzles of adolescence held him as their sport, and, with such material to work upon, they produced a mental chaos of emotional extremes. For all his friendships, he remained in the isolation that is ever the lot of the exceptionally gifted, for no one could have given him perfect understanding. In 1804 he had lost Dr. Drury, and on the rebound of that separation he flung himself into fierce opposition to Drury's successor, Dr. Butler, a hostility marked by at least one act of insensate fury—the tearing down of the grating from the windows of the Hall. Questioned why he did so, he answered with a futility that betrayed the utter purpose-

100

THE HARROW BOY

lessness of his rage, " Because it darkened the **Hall.**" It may very well be that, until he was taken to task, he hardly realised what he had done, the mad fit having obliterated consciousness of everything except his own self—that George Gordon Byron was playing a part of high indignation against Harrow and all its works; and when the challenge of authority pricked that bubble, he was at a loss and could only take refuge in the first empty evasion that occurred to him.

The reflections of unhappiness at school are balanced by brighter glimpses, and must be taken as the expression of the intense moods of a moment. The growing antagonism to his mother certainly added to his worries, but even there a large discount must be made. When he considered himself ill-used by Mr. Henry Drury, Dr. Drury's son, he wrote to his mother in a strain proving clearly that in 1808, at least, he could turn confidently to her for championship. He wishes to be taken away from Harrow, and threatens with a fine young arrogance that if not removed he will remove himself; but he ends by saying " I am sure you will not see me *ill-treated*," and in a postscript he says " God bless you, bless you." The indications already given point unmistakably to a moment when the relations between mother and son passed from kindness and confidence to the bitterest antagonism. Mrs. Byron's character has been unfairly coloured by circumstances which followed the definite break.

It has been assumed **that from his earliest infancy**

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

Byron was the hapless victim of his another's rage and dislike. The truth seems to be rather that it was not until the headstrong, wilful and self-sufficient boy felt the stirrings of adolescence, with all its deceptive, obscure and contradictory impulses, that he began to regard his mother as his enemy. The idea indulged, quickly became an obsession; and as he gradually elaborated it and gave it literary expression in his letters to Augusta, it soon passed beyond all bounds. The picture he left of those bickerings has been a fruitful source of misconception and the cause of not a little injustice to Mrs. Byron's memory.

In spite of his miseries—real and supposed—at Harrow, and the long hours spent in brooding and tears on Peachey's tomb, Byron did not shut him from his kind, however much he may have eaten his heart alone and fed with sighs the passing wind. By his own confession, he bore more than his share in rows, and held his own in sports, which were not then so highly developed or organised as they are to-day. Of his performances in the cricket-field he was not a little proud : he makes frequent mention of it in his letters, and his account of his score in the Eton and Harrow match of 1805 does not entirely agree with the record of old Lilly white. The error, if error there be, is in his own favour. According to Lillywhite, Byron made seven in his first innings, and two in the second. In his letter to young Cowell, however, he says he " made more notches than any of our side except Brockman and Ipswich,—eleven in the first

103

THE HARROW BOY

innings and seven, in the second." The match was played on the old Dorset Square ground, and in the evening both teams spent a merry night together in London, after a fashion more associated with the ways of undergraduates than with those of mere schoolboys. The parallel with later times is maintained by an account of seven in one cab going to the play, racket in the theatre, and a general haziness next morning as to how at least one of the party had got home to bed. Freedom of this sort is not now granted to the young beneficiaries of Holy Henry or John Lyon.

Heads might have been a little confused next morning, but soon wits were awake, and a metrical correspondence ensued between the two teams. The captain of the winning side, Eton, forwarded to the Harrow captain the following choice effort:

Adventurous Boys of Harrow School,
Of cricket you've no knowledge;
You play not cricket, but the fool,
With Men of Eton College.

But Eton was to get a Roland for its Oliver :

Ye Eton wags ! To play the fool
Is not the boast of Harrow School;
What wonder then at our defeat?
Folly like yours could not be beat.

Mr. Minchin,¹ who quotes the verses, asks not unnatu-

l " Old Harrow Days."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

rally, " Was Byron the author of this epigram ? " The rhetorical balance of the verses certainly points that way.

The match was Byron's last school exploit. He had now almost finished what he called later, with young pomposity, " his *Classical Labour*," and was ready to enter Trinity College, Cambridge, in the following October.

No sooner was he gone than he began to throw a poetical halo over hated Harrow. Like Horace, whom he hated so, he might have said of himself :

Romæ Tibur amem ventosus, Tibure Romam.

With him distance—in the case of Harrow, at any rate—lent enchantment. Oblivious to all complaints which he had put on record, he could write with (at the moment of writing) equal sincerity :

Ida! blest spot, where Science holds her reign,
How joyous once I joined thy youthful train!
Bright in idea gleams thy lofty spire,
Again I mingle with thy playful quire;

Through winding paths along the glade, I trace,
The social smile of every welcome face;
My wonted haunts, my scenes of joy and woe,
Each early boyish friend, or youthful foe,
Our feuds dissolved, but not my friendship past,—
I bless the former, and forgive the last.

THE HARROW BOY

In all the Harrow poems he harps rather monotonously upon one string, and betrays himself as a confirmed young sentimentalist; but the slightly extravagant devotion of these pieces has its own use in enabling us to get the right perspective of Byron at Harrow. His experience was that of the average schoolboy; but, as he was not the average schoolboy, he exaggerated both his joys and sorrows. Every rapture, every complaint, must be discomfited as the expression of a mood, intense while it lasted, but fleeting, and with no accurate relation to actuality.

VII. THE COMING OF THE POET

AN undergraduate is only a schoolboy of a larger growth. The same violent likes and dislikes, the same chafing at authority, and the same hectic moods marked Byron at Cambridge no less than at Harrow; but the greater liberty of the University man permitted of greater extravagances, both mental and physical. The mental turmoil is keener, the atmosphere is one of freer discussion, "obstinate questionings" make themselves felt with greater insistence, and young self-sufficiency plumes itself on its bold scepticism. For the University officials, as such, Byron had little respect—witness his scathing portrait of Porson. His own account of his going up to Trinity in October 1805 is that he was "miserable and untoward to a degree." "I was wretched at leaving Harrow, to which I had become attached during the last two years of my stay there—wretched at going to Cambridge instead of Oxford (there were no rooms vacant at Christ Church); wretched at some private domestic circumstances of different kinds, and consequently about as unsocial as a wolf taken from the troop." But again comes the inevitable discount. The letter in which that complaint is made gives evidence of a good deal of coming and going with his contemporaries, and although he stoutly denies that there was **any** intimacy with his fellow-imdergraduates **at that**

106

THE COMING OF THE POET

time, the charge of unsociability does not seem altogether well founded. He makes an exception in the case of his old school-fellow, Edward Long, with whom he used to pass the day in riding and swimming, and with William Banks, who was "good-natured and tolerant of my ferocities." If a man has two intimates at college, he does not badly. The ruck of one's contemporaries at the University are chance acquaintances, whom one does not see every day. Byron seems to have asked more of college life than it was capable of giving; but he was always greedy of friendship, demanding the very utmost of those he loved; and it will be remembered that his school quarrel with Clare—an incident that, for all its pain to those concerned, seems almost serio-comic—arose from his own wounded pride because Clare in a letter had addressed him as "My dear Byron," instead of the usual form, "my dearest." It may very well be, then, that his unsociability and alleged lack of friends at Cambridge was due more to his own exactions in friendship than to any actual isolation. The isolation was spiritual rather than social, and that plague was to pursue him through life. But the trouble lay within himself. He admits in another letter, "My companions were not unsocial, but the contrary—lively, hospitable, of rank and fortune, and gay far beyond my gaiety. I mingled with and dined and supped etc. with them; but I know not how. It was one of the deadliest and heaviest feelings of my life to feel **that I was no longer a boy.**"

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

His daily occupations were those of the ordinary undergraduate. He rode, bathed, lounged and read, and in the evenings he and Long had music. Byron was no performer, although he sang indifferently, but Long played both flute and violoncello. They were more temperate, as a rule, than undergraduates were at that period. Their chief beverage was soda water; but on occasion Byron, at least, fell into the ways of the place so far as to join in parties where the potations were stronger and the end was the usual rowdiness. They serenaded the Master, Lort Mansel, with ribald strains, " Good Lort, Deliver us "; and Byron's sardonic humour found practical expression in his bringing a pet bear up with him one term. The point of this sublime joke lay in the explanation. When he was asked the reason for the bear's presence in Cambridge, he said that the animal had come up to sit for a Fellowship. The mildness of the jest is characteristic of that puerility which pursues even the more steady-going young man to the University. His wit also took shape in skits upon authority, which aroused no serious opposition. " The Masters and Fellows " he describes as " all very polite, but look a little askance—don't much admire lampoons—truth always disagreeable." Still, it would appear, an arrogant young man, and a trifle patronising towards his pastors and masters.

Growing self-consciousness and self-esteem were now leading him to a new concern about his personal appearance. He had a thorn in the flesh : to wit, flesh too

108

THE COMING OF THE POET

solid. At Harrow he had grown up into a fat and rather clumsy boy : a thing not lightly to be brooked in one whose thoughts were tending towards poetical spirituality. The impulse towards dandyism, physical and mental, made him impatient of his fat, and he began those severe reducing processes—the baths, the violent exercise, the use of medicines, and the insufficient diet—the foundations of those digestive troubles which cost him continual suffering. Their monument is the famous stanza in " Don Juan " :

The liver is the lazaret of bile.

Gradually, too, in spite of this enforced temperance, he was drawn into the more riotous vortex of University life. In his third year he writes : " This place is wretched enough—a villainous chaos of din and drunkenness, nothing but hazard and Burgundy, hunting, mathematics and Newmarket, riot and racing—yet it is a Paradise compared with the eternal dullness of Southwell. Oh, the misery of doing nothing but make love, enemies, and verses ! "

The making of love and verses had now begun in earnest. During his school days there had been one serious love-affair, which was to leave an indelible mark upon his character; and before he left Harrow the making of verses had become something more than a polite routine exercise in translation from the classics. The year before he left school, while staying with his mother at Southwell, he was reading, with Elizabeth

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

Pigot, Burns's " Farewell to Ayrshire." On the spur of the moment Byron exclaimed, " I like that, metre—let me try it "; and immediately he threw off the stanzas beginning

Hills of Annesley, bleak and barren.

The metrical inspiration was Burns, but the spiritual origin was the young love of his boyhood, which had brought him only disappointment. Encouraged by Miss Pigot, the awakening Muse of Byron went on to further efforts, not all of the moment, for he brought out things written as early as 1802 and the even earlier work of 1800, the poem to his cousin Margaret Parker. Before long the desire to appear in print took possession of him. He collected the material he had by him, added new verses, and at last thought he might venture a small volume for private circulation. In August 1806, during his first Long Vacation, the manuscript went to Ridge, a Newark bookseller. In due time the quarto of sixty-six pages issued from the press, after a fierce struggle with proofs, in which Byron displayed all the amateur author's contempt for the printer's mechanical troubles. The printing of the book must have cost Ridge more than a little sorrow, so numerous were the alterations and last-moment additions. The book came to birth, but to all intents and purposes it was still-born. The first copy, forwarded by the author to his friend the Rev. John Becher, gravely disturbed that worthy man; for these efforts of a budding Muse betrayed, more than

110

THE COMING OF THE POET

was convenient, the influence of Thomas Little. At least one poem overstepped the decorous bounds of amorous enthusiasm—so worthy Mr. Becher thought; although in the light of much that is published at the present day, the verses may not seem so very outrageous. But they confessed to a knowledge which, if based on actual experience, would not have raised Byron in the estimation of friends as serious-minded as Mr. Becher. The good vicar was probably more concerned for his young friend's reputation than shocked by the poetry. However that may have been, he advised the destruction of the whole impression, and Byron gallantly watched the sacrifice of his bantling on Becher's hearth. One copy had already gone to his friend John Pigot, then a medical student at Edinburgh, and was not recalled. Mr. Becher, with a slight lack of thoroughness, saved his own copy. Pigot's still exists, but with the offending leaves torn out, and Mr. Becher's copy is now in the possession of Mr. Buxton Forman. The British Museum has only a replica.

On grounds of morality and taste, Becher was certainly justified in his advice, for the verses have no redeeming poetical merit. Elze declares that there is " nothing to compensate for their silly viciousness, not one felicity of thought or expression." The criticism is just; the poem is the work of a naughty boy, who had an imagination too unhealthily vivid and precocious. It was the first-fruits of Moore's seduction of Byron's mind. " Heigho! " exclaimed the poet, writing to Moore in

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

1820, " I believe all the mischief I have ever done or sung has been owing to that confounded book of yours."

Many must have been the covert leering communications among the select circle of intimates in those days upon the Hill, and Byron at least had learned his lesson only too well.

Whatever disappointment Becher's pious sacrifice may have cost Byron, it did not clip the wings of his Muse. The book was not to perish utterly, if industry and an expurgating hand could avail. The poet, undaunted, projected a revised and enlarged edition, which went to press forthwith and issued as " Hours of Idleness." This brought compliments from Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling, and from Lord Woodhouselee. Byron now appears fully in the character of author and behaving as such. " Has Ridge sold well? " he asks Miss Pigot, " or do the Ancients demur? " He is keen, too, upon his reviews, is proud of a long notice in Crosby's magazine, *Literary Recreations*, a paper too closely connected in a business way with Ridge for its opinion to be really valuable, but not the less pleasing to young talent, which is highly flattered and confesses to the same with happy ingenuousness. " In every bookseller's window I see my own name, and say nothing, but enjoy my fame in secret." It may be doubted how **far**—among his friends, at least—the vaunted secret was not a *secret de Polichinelle*. Not much secrecy could have been possible, seeing that the book bore the author's name **and** title in full, with the added description

112

THE COMING OF THE POET

"A Minor." This, together with the acknowledgment of rank, was, more than the mere verses, to lay him open to the knife of *The Edinburgh Review*. That surgery, however, was some distance ahead. Byron enjoyed to the full the first breath of poetical success. He was in high feather, full of plans, and highly flattered by the rumour that *The Edinburgh Review* intended to notice him. Anticipating rough handling, he sent a message to his mother that she was not to be out of humour with the critics, and to prepare her mind for the greatest hostility on their part. It was in February 1808 that the blow fell. Not all his preparation of mind beforehand could break the shock. Three bottles of claret to his own share after dinner brought no relief. "There is none other medicine against love," says Theocritus, "save the Muses of Pieria "; and what holds good of love holds good also of hate, so to retaliatory verse the angry Byron betook himself, and after the first twenty lines he felt considerably better. Once more it was a case of

Archilochum proprio rabies armavit iambo.

Thus, in rabid mood, Byron began the satire that was to advance but not ensure his fame. He had, he conceived, been hit below the belt, a thing not to be lightly endured by the favourite pupil of Gentleman Jackson (with whom, during vacation visits to London, he was now taking regular sparring lessons); but if the blow delivered by the critics of creaking couplets who wagged

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

their pows in the tavern halls of Auld Reekie was a foul, the retaliation would be clean and straight, from the shoulder, although the blow on paper would not be delivered with the lightning return of the prize ring. He went, as it were, into training and for several months patiently elaborated his reply.

It was a very dogged and angry genius that could keep up the mood of revenge uncooled through a twelvemonth of inaction. While the satire was still on the anvil, Byron came of age, and January 22nd, 1809, was marked at Newstead with junkettings as elaborate as a slender purse would allow—a ball for the quality, an ox roasted whole to delight the tenantry. The poet, despite his severe dieting, allowed himself a little licence on the great day. His indulgence, however, took an odd form. He chose fare which, though plain, always disagreed with him. It was his favourite meat and drink, and he was not to be balked : " eggs, bacon, and a bottle of ale, which he never used but on great jubilees." Many years later he celebrated his daughter Allegra's birthday in a similar fashion.

But such lighter interludes as the Newstead feast did not for long distract his energies from the sterner business in hand. Perhaps even the consequent indigestion was a help, for, as the work proceeded, he found new rocks of offence, and turned them to immediate account. The chief sinner was his guardian, Lord Carlisle, whose cool reception of his ward's dutiful dedication to his lordship had inspired angry feelings, which, however,

114

THE COMING OF THE POET

had been so far mollified that the first draft of the poem contained the handsome compliment:

On one alone Apollo deigns to smile,
And crowns a new Roscommon in Carlisle.

But the coming of age was attended with an incident that caused a revulsion.

Byron had written to Lord Carlisle reminding him that he would shortly take his seat in the House of Lords, a pretty broad hint that he would like his guardian to introduce him; but Carlisle returned only a stiff reply indicating the forms usually observed on the occasion. He made no offer to act as sponsor. Hence bile resurgent, and the alteration of the flattering verses to :

Roscommon, Sheffield, with your spirits fled,
No future laurels deck a noble head.

(The poet here seems to have forgotten his own rank and hopes.)

No muse will cheer with renovating smile,
The paralytic puling of Carlisle.

And so on to the end of the familiar passage, afterwards recanted. Not least did he regret the cruelty of one unwitting thrust. So little acquaintance had Byron with his guardian, that he did not know that Carlisle suffered from a nervous disorder.

If the corrections and late alterations of " Hours of

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

Idleness " had been a sorrow to Ridge, they were nothing to the troubles of Byron's friend, Mr. Dallas, who had undertaken to see " English Bards " through the press. Nor were all these afterthoughts uncomplimentary. A Horatian satire that was to touch every point must mingle the sweet with its harsher uses, and among the later lines were the generous tributes to Crabbe and Rogers. The young man was worldly-wise enough to see that indiscriminate vituperation would defeat its own end. The fierce tirade must be relieved by passages of praise, if he was to commend himself as a critic to the critics.

There was not a little of the journalist in Byron's method at this moment. He was quick to take hints from current events. An incident that moved him deeply, Lord Falkland's death in a duel, inspired him to a fine passage.

The poem reflects the odd kinks in the author's mind. Even when making game of his *bete-noire*, the Reverend Mr. Bowles, he throws that poet's chaste and gentle muse into incongruous company

With gentle Little's moral song.

At last he came to dread the burden of his own fertility and wrote to Dallas, " Print soon, or I shall overflow with rhyme." Here, unconsciously, he proves that he was indeed overflowing with rhyme. The order to **Dallas** is itself a heroic pentameter.

The anonymity of **the** satire, published by Cawthorn,
116

THE COMING OP THE POET

in March 1809, was no disguise. Byron's reputation, although small, together with the subject-matter and obvious aim of the attack, gave ground for shrewd guesses. A few days before the poem appeared, Byron, in an atmosphere of chilling discouragement, had taken his seat in the House of Lords, and had made a conscientious effort to attend one or two subsequent sittings; but so uncongenial did he find the task of Hereditary Legislation in a place where he felt himself to be something of an outsider, that within the week he retreated, as Moore with an almost Radcliff touch says, "to the seclusion of his own Abbey, there to brood . . . etc."¹ Although the biographer imagines that the subjects of the poet's melancholy reflections turned on the "bitterness of premature experience," it is more likely, if budding authors run true to type, that his thoughts were anticipatory rather than retrospective. Such fever as may have consumed him would have its origin in hopes and fears for the fate of his satire at the hands of hostile critics and a public "uncertain, coy, and hard to please." He must have longed, with longing unspeakable, for a thundering success and the gratifying assurance that he had made, not only the Edinburgh assassins, but the whole poetic hierarchy recognise that a Daniel had come to judgment, and, to complete the touch of melodrama, that virtue had been rewarded and vice punished by the brooding anchorite of Newstead.

He was not kept long in suspense. In a very few days, success, unqualified and resounding, summoned him back

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

to town. Conscious of the venom of his personal invective, he considered his presence in London, necessary that he might answer for his verses with his life, if called upon. But to his disappointment no cartels awaited him, and he could only mourn the decay of chivalry. There was comfort, however, in drinking in the breath of fame, for his praise was in the public mouth. Sedulous Dallas had already told him heart-warming anecdotes of Cawthorn's rapid sales, and how Hatchard, royal bibliopole, had no copies left and was going to send for more ! Further, how the same Hatchard had confidently named the author, and that a Lady of Distinction in that distinguished shop had " without hesitation, asked for Lord Byron's satire."

Cartels or none, there lay to hand a more urgent and pleasing duty, the preparation of a second edition, and to this Byron addressed himself *con amore*. His still fecund Muse presented him with about a hundred additional lines. Not content with this, he signed his name and wrote a truculent preface rebuking a degenerate age that had forgotten the resort to arms in literary quarrels, and announcing his impending departure from an unchivalrous country. Vengeance might keep hot till his return, for *he was coming back*. His Preface was designed to tell the world unmistakably that, so far from fleeing the country in fear, Lord Byron, like any other gentleman of honour and position, proposed a pleasure trip to Southern Europe and the East, where he hoped to find something which would lift the boredom en-

113

THE COMING OF THE POET

gendered by the supine and spineless attitude of his fellow-countrymen under abuse. If further literary abuse were forthcoming, he hoped to light his pipe with it in Persia. But his *wanderlust* sprang from a deeper source, and one that he himself confessed in later life was "sedulously concealed." Just before his departure from England he had met Mary Chaworth, his old love, now married and a mother. This meeting awoke the most poignant suffering, and at the sight of Mary's child he could hardly suppress his emotion. Dickens, speaking of a similar situation, says : "What fine hidden sensibilities are touched in such a case : no echoes tell, but so it is. . . ." At that interview, Mrs. Musters asked him his reason for quitting England, and he replied with the verses entitled "The Farewell"—almost matter of fact in their directness of confession. He elaborated the same theme in the stanzas "On Leaving England."

But the bitterness of young love unrequited could not altogether destroy the zest for new adventure. At one-and-twenty a wounded spirit is ill to keep, and the pain is deep only as long as the mind is actually centred on the beloved and lost object of affection. Just as in time of war one cannot be thinking about the war all day, and life for the most part sustains its normal routine, so every lover who, as Ovid says, is a soldier, may look beyond the conflict in his own breast, and for a moment forget his private tragedy. To a temperament like Byron's the new adventure offered no small allure-

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

ment. If the amorous dream had faded, another dream offered bright prospects of fulfilment. The little boy who, in a far-off northern town, had devoured Turkish history, feeding his imagination with Oriental glamour, was now about to see the countries of his desire. His hereditary adventurousness, which had hitherto had small scope in scholastic and academic surroundings, and had found only meagre satisfaction in bursts of riotous living or the counterfeit amours which he describes as his "graduation in Vice," was now to enter upon the field of actuality. The prospect of seeing Southern Europe and the Near East filled his mind with a medley of images, poetical, romantic, passionate. In his own person he would emulate the deeds of lawless men. He would breathe the atmosphere of a luxurious despotism and might even penetrate the mysteries of "hushed Seraglios." Small wonder, then, that the devout lover embarked at Falmouth in high spirits, or that his Muse, which had so lately shed the pensive tear for Mary, should now put on the saffron robe of ribaldry.

To his friend Hodgson, he addressed those hilarious stanzas of farewell to England, which read so curiously when they are placed beside Childe Harold's song inspired by the self-same embarkation. Byron's merry mood at departure cost Moore many heart-searchings, which led him, however, only to the familiar conclusion that "such bursts of vivacity on the surface are by no means incompatible with a wounded spirit underneath." He quotes in support Cowper's composition of "John

120

THE COMING OF THE POET

Gilpin " in circumstances of the deepest dejection, but the cases are scarcely parallel. It is doubtful whether it is necessary to insist overmuch upon the compatibility of the wounded spirit with the spirit of jubilation. The mind of Byron seems to have been made up of water-tight compartments. One mood was entirely exclusive of the other : his thought fastened with a fierce intensity upon the immediate object, which it expressed in terms of that object; and those who seek to reconcile this phase with that, do but land themselves in a maze to which the study of characters more normal affords no clue. Like Pope's spider, Byron feels at each thread and lives along the line : the instant moment, coloured by his thought, was to him the only reality. Long ago there was a rhyme sung on the eve of holidays by school boys, which seems to sum up the very spirit in which he set out on his excursion. The jingle, once current in Aberdeen, may not be so early as 1798, and Byron may not have known it, but the rhythm is the very rhythm of the verses to Hodgson :

Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta,
Off to Greece for we are free;
Helter, skelter, melter, pelter,
We're the lads for mirth and spree.

Even granting that there was an underlying vein of melancholy, the prospect that lay before the voyager promised no small compensation.

In surveying the kaleidoscopic character, it is always

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

difficult to determine with accuracy how much of a mood at any given moment is genuine and how much of it is pose. The phases alternate from one thing to the other with the rapidity and frequency of lightning flashes. It is no more correct to say that Byron left Falmouth in the grip of despair, bravely trying to hide his wound beneath a mask of levity, than to state that when he wrote " Farewell to Mary " he had no real sorrow at heart and was adopting the pose of disconsolate lover merely for his private amusement. His actual frame of mind Had elements of both states, but neither fully nor truly defined it.

Not completely non-moral, but prone to run exactly contrary to any promptings of an ever lively conscience, Byron could see no reason at all why his opinions should be consistent. Consistency, in his view, like calculating prudence or solvency, was one of those so-called virtues which of right belonged to the humdrum, and he felt that a settled state of mind ill became a brilliant young peer whose scurrilous writings were eagerly sought after by ladies of distinction at the counter of the King's Bookseller. Conventional virtue, with all it implied, appeared to him as a particularly irksome part of those rigid Presbyterian dogmas which May or Agnes Gray had tried to instil into him in childhood. He had soared now to a different plane, and such teachings were of as little consequence, and as much a hindrance to self-expression, as a nurse's presence would be to a young man of twenty-one. Regretful

122

THE COMING OP THE POET

that he could no longer by any stretch of imagination consider himself a child, he probably felt that it behoved him to put childish things uncompromisingly from him.

One quality alone appears stable in Byron's mentality, namely, the desire for self-expression. It is not due altogether to abounding self-esteem, nor can it be attributed justly to self-love in the absolute sense. It is, rather, the outcome of a highly developed consciousness of himself and the result of his having been, since the days of his earliest memory, a child, a boy, and (to a less degree) a youth apart. Lameness, preventing him from taking a full share in the ordinary life of a small boy, earned him nicknames which had been continual testimony to the fact that he was not as others; in his home life there were no brothers or sisters to chip off the sharp edges from his own excellent opinion of himself; with the merciless cynicism of the child who knows to a nicety how far he may with safety flout the disciplinary strictures of adults, he had found it always a ridiculously easy task to over-ride the control of mother or maids; and, most flattering of all, he had become a titled personage in his eleventh year. Just as the adult can be kept down to a due sense of his unimportance only by constant association with his equals, so the child can achieve balance only by and from the constant mental and physical friction with other children.

Byron, only son of his mother and she a widow, had made, by the time he attained his majority, the empirical discovery that it was not less easy than pleasant to

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

place the gratification of his own desires foremost, and that of opinions, none save his own seemed worth the holding. Thus handicapped, nothing but the fortunate possession of both poetic genius and a sensible friend enabled him to achieve fame. Left to himself, Byron might never have been remembered as anything more than an occasionally able writer of lampoons.

VIII. THE PILGRIM

O THER factors than the pangs of despised love and the hope to realise vague early dreams enter into Byron's desire for travel. His sense of his own importance was increasing, and he was building up in imagination the figure of a Byron who was yet to count in the eyes of men, not as a mere scribbler, but as a person of weightier metal. This sense was not lessened by the fact that his own social position, in the strictly social sense, was as yet little more than a cipher. The chilling experience of his visits to the House of Lords had rather stimulated than damped his determination to vindicate himself. The boy who had been known at Dr. Glennie's as "the Old English Baron," whether from his own young arrogance or from the Doctor's obsequiousness, was fully alive to the baronial concept, which assumed in his mind a form somewhat archaic. His miscellaneous and romantic reading, his feeling for his family history, more especially on the father's side, coloured his thought with ideas that in the early nineteenth century were wearing threadbare. He could not go forth as a Crusader; his infirmity barred him from the foreign wars; but there was one rôle of the young nobleman of an earlier age that he could still play. The palmy days of the Grand Tour were over,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

but the rarity of that adventure, revived in the person of a coming man, would only lend it a finer accent, a greater distinction; and it was to be the Grand Tour with a difference. The young men of the latter half of the seventeenth century went out handicapped by the presence of a "bear leader," who hampered their efforts to see the best society. "For men of worth and parts," says Locke, "will not easily admit the familiarity of boys who yet need the care of a tutor : though a young gentleman and stranger appearing like a man and showing a desire to inform himself in the customs, laws, and government of the country he is in, will find welcome, assistance and entertainment everywhere."

This young gentleman and stranger, unhindered by tutors or governors, was to appear like a man, with a chosen friend¹ and his own retinue of servants. All the circumstances fed his self-love and flattered his hopes of distinction. The young lords who had gone that way before were still in a rather degrading *statu pupillari*: he at least was completely emancipated—a graduate of his University, little as he valued that distinction. As he truly said, "his unjust step-mother, Alma Mater," had no choice but confer a degree on a nobleman after the farcical examinations, but even here there was something out of the common. He had fulfilled Clarendon's precept that young men should not be sent on the Grand Tour until they had been through Oxford or Cambridge. From Lady Mary Wortley Montagu he had learned that

1 John Cam Hobhouse, afterwards Lord Broughton.

THE PILGRIM

the average young man on his travels was nicknamed a golden ass.

While making his preparations for departure, he was very full of himself. He would be absent possibly for a long time : he must have mementoes of those he loved. This was a costly affair. Photography was then not come out of the laboratory. Nowadays he would simply have begged a photograph, but at that time the only thing to do was " to get a friend's picture," which meant asking him to sit to a miniaturist, and paying the bill. " I have," he writes, " employed one of the first miniature painters of the day to take them, of course at my own expense, as I never allow my acquaintance to incur the least expenditure to gratify a whim of mine. To mention this may seem indelicate; but when I tell you a friend of ours at first refused to sit, under the idea that he was to disburse on the occasion, you will see that it is necessary to state these preliminaries to prevent the recurrence of any similar mistake. I will see you in time and will carry you to the *limner*." Follows the sad reflection that the " resemblance may be the sole trace I shall be able to preserve of our past friendship and acquaintance. In the event of death or separation it will be a kind of satisfaction to trace in these resemblances all that remains of judgment, feeling, and a host of passions." These passions were of various kinds, and were easily diverted from fervent devotion to indignant irritability. One cherished friend whom Byron had asked to sit an hour with him excused himself, and to

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

Dallas the poet poured out his woe : " What do you think was his excuse ? He was engaged with his mother and some ladies to go shopping, and he knows I set out to-morrow, to be absent for years, perhaps never to return—Friendship ! I do not believe I shall leave behind me, yourself and family excepted and perhaps my mother, a single being who will care what becomes of me."

The young man who was so punctilious to see that no whim of his should prove expensive to his friends was not so particular where the commercial classes were concerned. At this time Mrs. Byron's presumed care for what might become of her son was increased by concern about his financial liabilities. She wrote to Hanson : " There is some tradespeople at Nottingham that will be completely ruined if he does not pay them, which I would not have happen for the whole world." The question of money for the journey was now acute. " I am ruined," says Byron, " unless Rochdale is sold "; but Dr. Hutchinson certified that he possessed an unimpaired healthy constitution, that he was sober and temperate, and on this the Provident Institute granted a loan on a life insurance policy which supplied a part of the means for the expedition. He had tried to obtain something from his estate in Chancery, but the court was obdurate. At the moment he could with difficulty command a shilling, but he begged Hanson to procure him three thousand pounds, to sell Rochdale in his absence, if possible, to pay off debts, do with the small

128

THE PILGRIM

balance what he will, " but allow me to depart from this cursed country, and I promise to turn Mussulman rather than return to it." But the cursed country held many cherished friends whose portraits must accompany the pilgrim. As a last precaution the prudent traveller, about to face unknown hazards, made his will. The reckless Gordon tendency was ever qualified—to some extent—by the careful Duff strain.¹

A young Milord about to visit the gorgeous East and steeped in the lavish ideas of the Orient knew that some open-handedness would be necessary. Accordingly he is to be found in Davies Street buying guns at Manton's. These weapons all found their way into Turkish, Greek or Albanian hands. Equipped at all points, he cleared Falmouth, not without metrical anticipations of the inconveniences that might await him in the Bay of Biscay or even before : experiences excluded from the loftier stanzas of " Childe Harold," but faithfully recorded in the more frivolous verse of the lines to Hodgson and in " Don Juan." The only hint the Childe allows himself is " And winds are rude in Biscay's sleepless bay," but after this hint the poet hastens to unfold the beauties of Cintra and the distant loveliness of Lisbon, the last qualified immediately by a touch of almost present-day realism in the disillusion of closer acquaintance :

For hut and palace show like filthily :

The dingy denizens are rear'd in dirt. . . .

¹ See Bulloch: " The Lucky Duffs." *English Illustrated Magazine*, June, 1898.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

These incidentals did not, however, deter Byron from entering on a period of riotous and almost school-boyish enjoyment of new scenes, new faces and new experiences amid the sunshine of the South. Freed at last from the chill fetters of the North, the Gordon daftness and gaiety asserted itself in full measure.

The exuberant juvenility that delighted in odd and quaint words, the flotsam and jetsam of his multifarious reading, bubbled up with a recrudescence of undergraduate idiocy in his letters and even in his verse. These affected oddities were the immediate and unrestricted expression of a mood that was yet to shape itself to finer issues in the poem that made him famous. How far this spirit of burlesque and mock archaism remained throughout the composition of the first two cantos of "Childe Harold" is a nice speculation. Possibly they were written merely to gratify a personal whim. Byron's small opinion of these cantos favours that conclusion. That his distrust of this particular effort was sincere, and arose from no misgiving as to his poetic faculty, is indicated by his obstinate confidence in the mediocre contemporary satire, "Hints from Horace." Once again it was a case of genius not knowing what it was about.

In Byron's letters constant stray phrases contain the germ or the reflection of ideas embodied in familiar lines. The sardonic mock-solemnity of Childe Harold's self-portraiture at the very opening of the poem (a passage that strongly corroborates the theory of a burlesque

180

THE PILGRIM

intention) looks out through his correspondence. The famous description of the alleged Newstead orgies, which dazzled and perhaps tantalized the eyes of the censorious, was written with his tongue in his cheek, and received at least a part of its form from sheer literary impulse. The poet's delight in a clinking alliteration outweighed strict regard for veracity in the shameless avowal of

Concubines and carnal companie.

It was alliteration first and truth nowhere. That he fancied the line is betrayed by its echo in a letter telling Hodgson that he intends to "leave off wine and carnal company," and betake himself to "politics and decorum."

Newstead was not blameless, but on examination the "riot most uncouth" shrinks to something scarcely spectacular, and in certain of its amorous aspects even unromantically thrifty. But the lines were written in the glowing South, and the picture may be, as the poet himself would say,

All the fault of that indecent sun.

In Portugal and Spain, Byron was taking full advantage of his place in the sun, with all it meant of recreation. No farther on than Lisbon, he has seen all sorts of marvellous sights. He finds convents¹ attractive because they flatter his young touch of pedantry, qualified

1 Subaudi: "Monasteries."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

by intentionally bad English grammar. " I loves oranges and talks bad Latin to the monks who understand it, as it is like their own. . . ." There is a chance, too, for the young man of quality who is something of an athlete " . . . and I goes into Society (with my pocket pistols) and I swims in the Tagus, all across at once, and I rides on an ass or a mule and swears Portuguese." Certain inconveniences there are, but " Comfort must not be expected by folks that go a-pleasuring. . . . I am infinitely amused with my pilgrimage as far as it goes."

Amusement found its high-water mark at Cadiz, to which Byron came by way of Gibraltar and Seville. At Seville his arts as a lady-killer, *malgre lui*, had brought him compliments from his landlady, which he takes care to report and translate in his letter to his mother, together with the comforting assurance that a fine presence and fine words had not vanquished him. Cadiz was quite another matter. What the Childe veils in classical symbolism, Don Juan admits in plain English. It was Cadiz Victrix for Byron, and he never forgot her charms. The letters grow lyrical with " Cadiz, sweet Cadiz," a refrain which, in that precise form, never found its way into a poem, but with a change of name is used to celebrate another birthplace of love—not light, but deep.

Of the Peninsular War, the letters from Spain and Portugal give no sign. Those written on the eve of the pilgrim's departure from England refer in passing to the state of affairs in France and Austria, but the only hint of the campaign in the Peninsula is a mere note that the

182

THE PILGRIM

ship's company includes " two officers' wives and ditto subalterns'." In a later letter occurs a reference to the Convention of Cintra. Yet during Byron's stay in Spain and Portugal, July-August, 1809, Talavera had been fought. The pilgrim had other business—nights at the opera, fair señoritas, visits to convent libraries and talks (in indifferent Latinity) with the monks. He " went on prosperously as a linguist and a lover."

As far as the letters are concerned there might have been no war at all, but memorable stanzas of " Childe Harold " prove that, amidst his recreations, he turned a clear eye upon political and military events. His way of life resembled his own description of Seville in those days :

Not here War's Clarion but Love's rebeck sounds.

Yet in one particular, purely sartorial, he affected the martial. " I have," he writes to his mother from Gibraltar, " a most superb uniform as a court dress, indispensable for travelling." He describes it elsewhere as a " staff " uniform. Whether he dared to wear it under the very eyes of the British Provost Marshal does not plainly appear, but it came out in full blaze in the somewhat safer surroundings of Constantinople, even when his business of the moment was no more warlike than the purchase of a few pipes.

Spain was all very well, but for sensations on the larger romantic scale it was necessary to leave civilisation a little farther behind. Laws might be lax, life hazardous,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

and virtue easy in a decaying Latin society, but that was only the prelude to adventure. The Near East beckoned and Byron obeyed. En route, Malta provided a new emotional passage,¹ more exclusively individual than the general adorations of Cadiz, and ending in a sentimental act of renunciation, very helpful, if not to peace at least to poetry. This sacrifice to virtue found its due record in verse, just as in verse and a private letter a later renunciation was to be described with meticulous detail that threw into high relief the self-denying lover's magnanimity.²

As he sailed from Malta to Prevesa by way of Patras, Byron caught a glimpse of Missolonghi. Romantic imagination might find prophetic symbolism in the circumstance that he first saw the place under an autumn sunset. A pragmatic age sets small store by such happenings, and rests content with recording the fact. Time, place and chance, as if in anticipation of a later poet's contention that Nature imitates Art, none the less combined to produce a situation entirely in the Byronic manner. The poet himself would have found the incident appropriate to a foredoomed Corsair.

From Michaelmas Day, when he landed in Albania, until November 12, there was no news of the pilgrim. But on the latter date he wrote to Mrs. Byron in a strain

1 The affair with Mrs. Spencer Smith, the "Florence" of "Childe Harold." Canto I.

2 The affair with Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster, "Lord Byron's Correspondence. Vol. I.

THE PILGRIM

of high good humour and enthusiasm. Albania had not disappointed him. He had seen things worthy of sight and had been entertained as became a young stranger of condition. " To my dear Mother " her " affectionate son " (a rather unusual signature with Byron) pours out a voluminous and informing tale, a little pedantically informative at times, for he must needs explain, in a parenthesis, that Albania is " the ancient Illyricum." He has been the guest of the Turkish governor, the great Ali Pacha, in his country house at Tepaleen, and wore his " staff uniform, with a very magnificent sabre, etc." for the occasion. He made an immediate impression. " The Vizier received me standing, a wonderful compliment from a Mussulman, and made me sit down on his right hand. . . . He said he was certain I was a man of birth because I had small ears, curling hair, and little white hands, and expressed himself pleased with my appearance and garb. He told me to consider him as a father while I was in Turkey, and said he looked on me as his son. Indeed he treated me like a child, sending me almonds and sugared sherbet, fruit and sweet-meats twenty times a day."

The worldly wisdom that chose these precise gems of information as a suitable " regale " (his own word) for Mrs. Byron, is equalled only by the simplicity which could confess " he treated me like a child." The shrewd old Ottoman saw through the fantastic boy at a glance, and knew to a hair's-breadth the right line to take with **him.**

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

The young man's head was, quite pardonably, a little turned. He, soon to become the most Romantic poet, and the most Romantic figure in the world after Napoleon, had arrived at the very heart of Romance in being. The scene and people at Tepaleen brought to his mind " with some change of *dress*, however, Scott's description of Branksome Castle in his *Lay*, and the feudal system. The Albanians in their dresses (the most magnificent in the world), consisting of a long *white kilt*, gold worked cloak, crimson velvet gold-laced jacket and waistcoat, silver-mounted pistols and daggers) the Tartars with their high caps, the Turks in their vast pelisses and turbans, the soldiers and black slaves with the horses, the former in groups in an immense open gallery in front of the palace, the latter placed in a kind of cloister below it, two hundred steeds ready caparisoned to move in a moment, couriers entering or passing out with the despatches, the kettle-drums beating, boys calling the hour from the minaret of the mosque, altogether, with the singular appearance of the building itself, formed a new and delightful spectacle to a stranger." (Hobhouse's description of the same scene is more restrained.)

Mamma was regaled with much more to the same **effect**, and with notes on historical topography. He had seen the Bay of Actium and the ruins of Nicopolis. The associations of both places he explained briefly for the benefit of a lady not deeply read in the Ancient Classics. He had lived with Albanian soldiers in their barracks, attended a Greek wedding, been nearly shipwrecked, **and**

186

THE PILGRIM

had had trouble with his servants, but he had "learnt to philosophise" in such cases of inconvenience. He intended going to Athens to study modern Greek, which "differs much from the ancient though radically similar." He will also study Greek human nature in its fairer half and worship in all good faith the triad of the Macri girls, making Theresa immortal in song. But that was all some way ahead. For the present would Mamma please see that Hanson remits regularly, for her son may progress to Egypt and Asia. The expense of the whole Albanian tour had not, by the way, been half as much as the stay—of only three weeks—in Malta. He wished to be remembered to no one in England, to which he would not return unless compelled by absolute want and Hanson's neglect. This fling was the only ungracious touch, a little sop to his own petulance, which he considered necessary after showing himself so well pleased with things in general.

In the main there was good reason for self-complacency. The young English Milord was doing the thing in style. Ali Pacha had given him a guard of about forty Albanians, whose picturesque costume and half-bandit ways flattered him with a sense of nearness to outlawry. What the blameless art of Skelt was to Stevenson, that to Byron were his kilted and yataghaned Albanians. The penny plain had become twopence coloured. The culmination of bizarre impression is to be found in Hobhouse's account of that night scene at Utraikey, where the Albanian bodyguard roasted a goat whole, and then

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

danced round the largest of their four fires, roaring songs which recounted some robbing exploit. One Song, more interminable than certain Gaelic ditties, took over an hour to sing, and during the choruses the warriors whirled round like dervishes. Their refrain—

κλέπτεις πότε Πάργα
Robbers all at Parga

is very possibly the same which on a later day Byron chanted in a weird howl to the Shelleys in their boat on the Lake of Geneva. He knew other Romaic songs, but that night at Utraikey when he saw the dance and heard the singing of

The wild Albanian, kirtled to the knee
With shawl-girt head and ornamented gun

was one of the most vivid images of his life, and it is not improbable that when he offered to delight his friends with an Albanian stave the robbers of Parga most naturally recurred to his memory.

The barbaric elements of the scene did not obscure for Byron the softer accessories of the southern night and the gentle whisper of the wind

Kissing, not ruffling the blue deep's serene,¹

but the reference to Nature is still objective. The partial approximation to a more Wordsworthian treat-

¹ Tennyson would have advised Byron to "drive the geese out" of this line.

THE PILGRIM

ment did not declare itself until the third canto. He was still far from the reflective mood, and two stanzas later he launched into the fierce martial measure of "Tambourgi, Tambourgi," fated to become a song popular in drawing-rooms and particularly stimulating to the young fancy of John Ruskin.

After Albania, Athens, which awoke deeper emotions than Byron was willing to confess. In the letter to Mr. Henry Drury he took care to guard against admission of anything approaching the pedagogic attitude towards Classical Antiquity.. It was the beauty of actual scenery rather than any association of locality that he professed most to admire, but when he said good-bye to Athens, in 1810, it was with reluctance, and Hobhouse tells how they could not refrain from looking back from ship-board towards the spot where they had caught their last glimpse of the Theseum and the ruins of the Parthenon through the vistas in the woods for many minutes after the City and the Acropolis had been totally hidden from their view.

Smyrna, Ephesus and the Troad were the next points in the itinerary. For Drury's edification Byron remarked that the Temple of Diana had almost perished, and that St. Paul need not trouble to epistolize the present brood of Ephesians, who had converted a large church, built entirely of marble, into a mosque—"and I don't know that the edifice looks the worse for it." Still fencing with scholarly conventions, he told his old master **that the Troad was a fine field for conjecture and**

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

snipe-shooting, and a good sportsman and an ingenious scholar might exercise their feet and faculties to great advantage upon the spot. About the " cursed quagmire of the Scamander " he waxed a trifle ribald in a veiled classical allusion. Although ostentatiously non-literary in his tone, he noted " by-the-bye " that he spoke the Romaic, or modern Greek, tolerably and that he could swear terribly in Turkish.

During his stay in Greece Byron had revised considerably his earlier opinion of the Romaic, and now thought it not so very unlike the ancient Greek. Of Constantinople he thought less than the surrounding scenery. There he recalled his early reading of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and censured her opinion that St. Paul's would cut a strange figure beside St. Sophia's. At the risk of " speaking like a Cockney," he defended St. Paul's, although he was sufficiently impressed with the Byzantine church to make the correct, if obvious, historical allusions. Byzantium, the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn, however, were nothing in his eyes to his own exploit of swimming from Europe to Asia. In season and out of season, he trumpeted the feat to his correspondents. And this was not his only spectacular act of classical reminiscence : he clambered up one of the Symplegades, and upon its summit he wrote, or at least composed, his burlesque translation of the opening lines of the " Medea." Touched by learned associations, he must yet make no concessions to sentiment, and, if classical, be at least comic* The jingle, despite its

140

THE PILGRIM

irreverent handling of Euripides, arouses regret that Byron did not attempt a version of Aristophanes in the same vein. Had he done so, John Hookham Frere might have had to endure a brother near the throne.

Before the end of the tour, Byron's old flightiness and irritability reappeared in his letters. Towards his mother the earlier cordial tone declined, and there are indications that the wanderer is smarting under maternal rebuke. He hints that she had been listening to gossip, and that not to his credit. To what exactly it referred does not appear. At a later period he spoke of an interval in his travels when no one knew what he was about (and he hints, with sly bravado, that he was up to no good), which may provide an explanation. His pursuits at this time may have been better known in the drawing-rooms of England than he imagined. However that may be, there was some deep cause of offence which made him complain, suddenly and apparently gratuitously, to Lord Sligo that his lameness was due to his mother's false delicacy at his birth.

IX. THE BYRONIC HERO

ONE model and one only sat for the portrait of the Byronic hero. That is not to say, however, that the portrait is, as a whole, faithful. Nor did its overwhelming success with its own age depend upon the parts that are truest to the original. The dark and gloomy figure of a Conrad or a Lara, with its secret but very obvious burden, which so impressed women, young and old—and even sensible men—and sent them into delicious ecstasies of sympathetic pity for creations and a creator so deserving, was taken at its face value. But the real betrayals do not lie in the general picture of a gloomy and burdened man, a creature of strange passions and unnamed crimes. In one aspect the Byronic hero is a monstrous convention, almost an imposture, the idol of a too-easily gullible public; in another he is a reality—the reflection of a mind that did not know how far or how completely it was betraying itself. It may not actually have realised its own idiosyncrasy, but that idiosyncrasy was of necessity revealed. In his projection of himself into the Byronic hero, the poet exaggerated and distorted the truth; but there were moments, purely subjective, when he seized upon traits of mental constitution and exhibited them without being **aware** that he was betraying the inmost secrets of a unique and extraordinary personality. He may even

142

THE BYRONIC HERO

have supposed that the feelings and emotions he described were common to all men.

The suggestion that Byron's violent moods were due to "a determination of blood to the brain," with its obliteration of all reason and a fierce concentration upon the object of hatred or desire, accompanied by a delight in the perversity of the emotion, finds support in the subjective phases of the Byronic hero. These often escape attention, for the figure in action has such verve and cogency that, when the mood changes to one of contemplation, the reader, irked at being retarded, hastens on to the next moment of physical activity. It is the hero in action who fills the bill, and on that the general concept of his personality is based : he is a man of blood, love and lust, crime and theatrical swashbucklery, a ready swordsman, a leader of outlaws, but chivalrous in his lawless fashion. So much is clear. The general idea of his mind is far less precise. For it there is a vague comprehensive expression—"dark and gloomy." Beyond that, few trouble to penetrate, and some may even conclude that there are no depths to sound. But if the revelations of his inner mind are singled out and examined collectively, the hero assumes a new and unfamiliar shape. Here is something apart from the mere swashbuckler or lover, or man of conventional melancholy. That all the separate incarnations of the hero contribute to this other personality, is only one more proof that on the objective side Byron made no attempt to individualise character. Outwardly the Giaour,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

Conrad, Lara, Alp represent a single formula. But from within they supply another, equally uniform, yet distinct. They show a personality too reflective and philosophic to fit these restless adventurers; something not germane to their obvious composition; a mind with a power of looking within itself and discovering there things entirely alien. The creator, losing sight of his extravagant creation, has looked into his own heart and has written, not of the puppets of his imagination, but of his real hero.

The Corsair's emotions are only a developed revelation of the poet's own early " silent rages "

. . . With each feature working from the heart,
With feelings loosed to strengthen—not depart,
That rise—convulse—contend—that freeze or glow,
Flush in the cheek, or damp upon the brow;
Then—Stranger ! if thou canst, and tremblest not,
Behold his soul . . .

Conrad " thought the voice of wrath a sacred call." But the wholly abandoned mood has its qualifications and contrasts, has moments when childishness and folly are realised :

None are all evil—quickenings round his heart
One softer feeling would not yet depart;
Oft could he sneer at others as beguiled
By passions worthy of a fool or child;
Yet 'gainst that passion vainly still he strove
And even in him it asks the name of Love.

THE BYRONIC HERO

Love and hate are inextricably commingled, melting into one another at a touch and even interdependent—almost, it would seem, one basal passion, different in name but in essence identical. In the Giaour :

The heart once thus left desolate
Must fly at last for ease—to hate.

And again in the Corsair, Gulnare confesses that she
Never loved enough to hate.

It does not matter that here the speaker is a woman : she is still the interpreter of her creator's self-knowledge. The surge, too, of Medora's supreme emotion reflects a personal experience, and gives yet further support to the theory of determination of blood to the brain, with its attendant paralysis of thought and will:

She heard no further—'twas in vain to strive—
So throb'd each vein—each thought—till then
withstood;

Her own dark soul—these words at once subdued :
She totters—falls. . . .

Perhaps the description of Conrad, raging in captivity, gives the most complete analysis of this tempest of emotion :

'Twere vain to paint to what his feelings grew,
It even were doubtful if their victim knew.
There is a war, a chaos of the mind,
When all its elements convulsed—combined—
Lie dark and jarring with perturbed force
And gnashing with impenitent remorse. . . .

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

These are the central revelations, but the picture of the hero contains other and more superficial elements which are not so much the unwitting expression of a unique personal experience. They are drawn, it is true, from the same model, but they are less intimate, and represent rather the guise under which Byron wished to represent himself to the world. These traits have something of artificiality, and are prompted by the same spirit of half-sardonic mockery which, in conversation, could congratulate itself on its own reputation of remoteness. "How pale I look," Byron said to Lord Sligo at Athens. "I should like, I think, to die of a consumption." "Why of a consumption?" asked his friend. "Because then," he answered, "the women would all say 'See that poor Byron—how interesting he looks in dying.' " Hence the exaggeration and affected melancholy of Lara, a hater of his kind :

. . . yet some would say,
With them he could seem gay amidst the gay;
But own'd that smile, if oft observed and near
Waned in its mirth, and withered to a sneer;
That smile might reach his lip, but pass'd not by,
None e'er could trace its laughter to his eye

There was in him a vital scorn of all:
As if the worst had fall'n which could befall,
He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another hurl'd;
A thing of dark imaginings. • • •

THE BYBONIC HERO

But even the more fictitious confessions cannot escape occasional glimpses of the poet's truer nature. Some key may be found to certain of his contradictions in the portrait of Lara, In moments of irritation he would go out of his way to give deliberate pain, an unlovely characteristic that became most acute in the scenes with Lady Byron. And in less gross instances he was swayed by a curious mutability; he vibrated between extremes, and the vehement avowal of a dislike or a distaste would throw him back immediately upon a course of action entirely the reverse*. During his first visit to Greece, he was all for renouncing literature and aggressive in proclaiming his intention, but this was only the prelude to his most important period of literary activity. At that moment he was probably quite sincere in planning to give up the ways of a scribbler, but the ever-present necessity for public self-expression forced him back to the only art at which he was an adept. The average man, having made an avowal, or disavowal, to the world, hesitates to do anything which would appear inconsistent, but consistency, as has been pointed out already, never troubled Byron.

It is possible that he found, in the very inconsistency of an act, a strange secret joy and a flattery of his self-love, just as Lara discovers :

. . . some strange perversity of thought
That sway'd him onward with **a** secret **pride**
To **do what** few **or** none would do beside,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

Less convincing is the insistence on the conventional melancholy of the hero, who is careful to guard himself against any misunderstanding of his lighter moods. These must not be taken as proof that he is not all the time consumed with an undying fire. No matter how bravely he may wear the mask of cheerfulness, his cheerfulness is only that of the Spartan boy when the fox was gnawing at his vitals. The world must be given to understand that the hero is all the time in a mental hell, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. It is the least sincere part of the portrait; the artist doth protest too much :

Strange though it seem, yet with extremest grief
Is linked a mirth—it doth not bring relief—
That playfulness of Sorrow ne'er beguiles,
And smiles in bitterness—but still it smiles.

The unhappiness of the Byronic hero on paper is several degrees more intense and persistent than that of the Hero Byron. In real life no man may be a hero to his valet, but when it comes to literary valeting by one who was in all things an extremist, the valet not only respects his master, but his respect tends to become exaggerated, and the hero emerges considerably overdressed.

Into the character of the hero enter also reminiscences of things well said at an earlier time, and evidently remembered for future use. It was not until a later period that Byron's physical infirmity took definite
m

THE BYRONIC HERO

poetical form, but a hint of it occurs in "Lara." Once when a friend had spoken flatteringly of his talents, he touched his head, saying "If this places me far above my fellows, that" (indicating his foot) "puts me equally far below them." The pointed phrase pleased him and reappeared, without actual reference to any deformity, in the lines :

So much he soared beyond, or sunk beneath,
The men with whom he felt condemned to breathe,
And long'd b;y good or ill to separate
Himself from all who shared his mortal state.

—a manifest instance of pose in one who so eagerly desired friendship and made more than ordinary exactions on his friends.

Idiosyncrasies of personal habit, too, were imputed even to a character like Conrad, who, judged by the cold standard of realism, would have been little likely to favour such eccentricities. That bold buccaneer could have had little of asceticism in his composition, but he displays just such a temperance as Byron, save during one period, forced himself to exercise. Conrad, on the eve of his last and greatest foray, will not be tempted by the wine-cup, and his resistance draws from Medora the words :

The grape's gay juice thy bosom never cheers;
Thou more than Moslem when the cup appears :

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

and her next remark very likely registers the approval of some unknown charmer for an abstinence as exemplary as it was unusual during the Regency :

Think not I mean to chide—for I rejoice
What others deem a penance is thy choice.

This sea rover is not only ascetic, but, it would appear, literary, for Medora woos him further, although on this occasion without success, for he was much pressed for time, to

• . . turn the tale, by Ariosto told
Of fair Olympia, loved and left of old.

Medora's tone implies that at a more leisured moment such romantic recreations were customary and not unwelcome. Here speaks the inveterate literary man in the creator, who has in mind not only Ariosto, but Dante's tale of Paolo and Francesca.

In the earlier poems the premonitions of the hero run true to type. In the Elegy on Newstead Abbey the youthful lord, for all his hopes of " splendid hours " yet to be enjoyed in his " grey worn towers," views them " but to weep "; and in Harrow Churchyard he seeks comfort in the thought of " some humble grave, some narrow cell." Into his youth he flings back at a later period the expression of his culminated sorrows. Although " The Dream ** is the record of a boyish grief, it reflects no less the bitterest trials of his man-

150

THE BYRONIC HERO

hood, and the lonely, stern misanthrope paints himself full length :

. • . he was a mark
For blight and desolation . • • Pain was mixM
In all which was served up to him.

Similarly the larger and more restrained presentations of the hero in " Childe Harold " are coloured and modified by an experience ranging over many years. The portrait is less direct, except in the juvenile phase at the openings. The narrator soon becomes absorbed in the scenes he is describing, and it is only in occasional interludes that he outlines his own personality. His descriptions of scenery, however, remain for the most part entirely objective. There is no Wordsworthian merging of the poet's self in the nature he portrays. But still his personality affects his work, and in the last two cantos—written at intervals respectively of seven and eight years after the two former—the development of his character under trial heightens the effect, and makes them second only to the " Prophecy of Dante " and the "Lament of Tasso" in pure poetical achievement.

Byron's last hero is still more sharply modified from the monotonous original. Don Juan is the outcome of a longer experience of the disappointments and unsatisfactoriness of life, but he is no longer a figure of melodrama. Juan is the average sensual man, raised considerably above the average by his natural gifts and his superabundant opportunities for their exercise. He

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

resembles the original Byronic type in so **far** as he is gallant, fearless, a ready fighter and a great lover; but these qualities are now further removed from the realm of Byronic Skelter and are interpreted through the medium of the man of fashion of the poet's own day. Byron did not err when he claimed that in Juan, for **all** its recklessness and ribaldry, he had at last written something human.

X. THE AWAKENING TO FAME

THE young man who in his last letters from Greece had confidently announced that he was done with scribbling, returned to London in the beginning of July 1811, with his eye firmly fixed on literary fame, and the materials (as he believed) in his portmanteau. On the 15th of the month Dallas had the pleasure of shaking hands with him at Reddish's Hotel in St. James's Street. Mr. Dallas, whose epistolary style is still finely reminiscent of the eighteenth century, records with evident relief and satisfaction that Byron's looks belied the report he had given of his bodily health, and his countenance did not betoken melancholy or displeasure at his return; he gave an animated account of his pilgrimage, and, strictly maintaining the character of one who scorned the narratives of passing travellers, he took care to let Dallas know that Lord Byron, at any rate, would not write any account of his journeyings. The conversation turning to literature less tabu, Byron said he believed satire to be his *forte*, and admitted that he had written his "Hints from Horace," from which he seemed to look for additional fame. Would Mr. Dallas superintend the publication, as he had done for "English Bards" ? Mr. Dallas was not only willing, but flattered. He could not at that moment run through

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

the manuscript; he had called at an awkward time, and my lord was much occupied; so he took the treasure away with him, after promising to breakfast with the poet next morning.

It was a disappointed Dallas who appeared the following day at St. James's Street. His discerning eye could find no striking merit in the new poem. This was not the rich result he had hoped from his friend's recent experiences. He was unwilling to wound, yet not afraid to strike; and when the worst was known, and he had mentioned his hopes of some better outcome of Eastern travel, Byron reluctantly produced another manuscript, which he handed over, stipulating that "Hints from Horace" should be offered to a publisher immediately.

If Byron was disappointed by Dallas's verdict on the satire, he was puzzled and even embarrassed by his friend's judgment upon the other work. It was with difficulty he could be made to believe that here was the true instrument of the fame he courted. He was obstinate, and would have withheld it from publication had not Dallas taken his own way. But for this good advice, Moore believed that Byron would have flung the manuscript into the fire, enraged at the attack which "Hints from Horace" would have drawn from the critics, had that work been published first. This Professor Wilson did not believe. "The deuce he would!" exclaimed Crusty Christopher; "he would have instantly written another satire—and it would

154

THE AWAKENING TO FAME

have been a red hot bar of iron. We cannot believe that the power of a mighty poet could have been palsied by a single stumble, however inopportune. Trust Byron." The satire, after one rejection, was accepted by Mr. Murray, to whom Dallas immediately thereafter offered " Childe Harold."

Before a final decision was come to, Byron suffered two bereavements—the loss of his mother and of his Cambridge friend, Charles Skinner Matthews. Mrs. Byron died before her son could reach Newstead. This stroke of fate had upon the poet an effect of which his detractors have made capital. His distress was violent. He sat alone by his mother's body, gave way to tears, and exclaimed to his mother's⁵ waiting woman: " Oh Mrs. By, I had but one friend in the world and she is gone."⁵⁵ It has been suggested that the words have an undertone of bitter irony. There is no reason why they should not be taken simply. Byron, with all his capriciousness, had a heart, and was capable of strong natural affection. Death, the great solvent, softens the memory of past differences. At that moment Byron remembered his mother only as the too fond and indulgent woman who, by his frequent confession, had spoiled him and had taken care that he should never lack any material comfort that lay in her power to give. That he refused to attend the funeral may seem strange, but it is unfair to put upon this any sinister interpretation; nor was it a heinous proof of the Byronic Original Sin that, immediately after the procession had left the Abbey, Byron

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

called his henchman, young Rushton, to join him in a bout with the gloves. The act may have an unseemly look, but this violence (for Rushton said that that *morning the poet's blows were exceptionally hard*) was a safety-valve to overcharged feelings and the way of escape from the impulse to lay violent hands upon himself. Bereavements crowded upon Byron. The death of Matthews and of his Harrow friend, Wingfield, following close upon that of his mother, drew from him the cry: "Some curse hangs over me and mine", "Come to me," he wrote to Scrope Davies, "I am almost desolate, left almost alone in the World." A letter written a few days later to Dallas throws significant light on his conduct in affliction: "Your letter gives me credit for more acute feelings than I possess: for though I feel tolerably miserable, yet I am at the same time subject to a kind of hysterical merriment, or rather laughter without merriment, which I can neither account for nor conquer, and yet I do not feel relieved by it, but an indifferent person would think me in excellent spirits." Then follows the inevitable touch of bravado: "We must forget these things and have recourse to our old selfish comforts, or rather comfortable selfishness. I do not think I shall return to London immediately and shall therefore accept freely what is offered courteously—your mediation between me and Murray."

The negotiations for the publication of the "Childe" were to produce a difficulty which does credit to Byron's

THE AWAKENING TO FAME

sense of literary honour. He had heard that Mr. Murray intended to show the manuscript of " Childe Harold " to Gifford, who had thought well of " English Bards "—and small wonder, for Byron had flung a grateful garland to the editor of the *Quarterly*. He felt, therefore, that Gifford's opinion of the poem might be favourably influenced by personal feeling, possibly against his critical judgment. The manuscripts of both poems were shown to Gifford, who spoke highly of the Satire and pronounced the Pilgrimage equal to any contemporary work. Byron was " not at all pleased," and he felt sure that Gifford must see the matter in the same light as he did : " His praise is nothing to the purpose; what could he say, he could not spit in the face of one who had praised him in every possible way . . . It is bad enough to be a scribbler, without having recourse to such shifts to extort praise or deprecate censure." The sensitive author quite mistook his publisher's intention, which was merely to obtain a critical opinion from one whom, as the editor of Murray's *Quarterly Review*, the publisher must naturally have considered the most competent available authority.

Byron was not to be appeased. " I *will* be angry with Murray," he wrote, and in the vehemence of an indignation that suggested rather the fractious schoolboy than the travelled thane who had seen many men and cities, he wished his publisher in Paddington Canal. But the breeze passed, and, with much meticulous correction, the poem struggled through the press.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

A few days before its publication, Byron appeared to the world in another role than that of author. His maiden speech in the House of Lords, delivered on 27th February 1812, brought him many compliments, and notice from that rank of society to which he belonged but had not yet entered. His first appearance as a political orator was no bad advertisement for his book, but it is hardly likely to have been calculated to that end, for the age was not skilled in the art of indirect publicity. It had, however, one valuable result to a rising poet, for the speech won Byron the friendship of Lord Holland and the entree to Holland House, where Lady Holland played at intellectualism and gave the law to the most exclusive literary coterie of the Whigs.

Two days later "Childe Harold" was in the hands of the public. Dallas, Murray and Gifford were justified of their confidence. It was a case to be described only by hackneyed phrases : "London was taken by storm." Orientally-minded Mr. Moore had no choice but to fly to the imagery of his Eastern romanticism : "The poet's fame seemed to spring up, like the palace of a fairy tale, in a night." Byron's own description has passed into the language and has done duty for so many less overwhelming successes that it is now worn threadbare : "I awoke one morning and found myself famous."

There had been nothing like it since the rising of Scott's star, which was to pale before Byron's : only,

THE AWAKENING TO FAME

however, because the Wizard of the North so willed it. He was a little hasty when he said "Byron beat me," but his surrender in poetry proved fortunate, since it gave the world the Waverley Novels. Scott's was the more versatile, if not the more poetic, genius. Byron had no second string. He once thought of fiction, but soon tossed his fragmentary experiment aside. It gave no better promise than Shelley's abortive efforts.

Society, as ever, was eager to claim and see the new lion. It is not every poet whose person fulfils the romantic expectations excited by his verse in fair and fashionable bosoms, but the remote and spiritual beauty of Byron and the charm of his manner heightened a delightful surprise—the appearance of an almost unknown scion of nobility who had suddenly gratified the aristocracy by proving to them that the inferior orders had no monopoly of genius. Invitations crowded in upon him; everybody who was anybody called upon him and desired his better acquaintance. If he had been successful with women before, he now made conquests in all of which he had not himself taken the initiative. To romantic poetry he had added the attraction of the most romantic personality of his time; and if any whisper of his wilder escapades crept abroad, that would be little likely to injure him with Regency society. Where the deputy head of the State was notorious for his gallantries, proficiency in those arts could hurt no man's reputation; and, to do Byron justice, he was not a heartless libertine

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

like Fum the Fourth. Greatly though Byron erred, he always asserted—and there is no reason to doubt his truth—that he never corrupted innocence.

For the blaze of popularity Byron was not altogether well prepared. Hitherto his position in life had been indeterminate. At school and college he had mixed with boys and young men of his own rank, and, as far as his narrow means permitted, he had lived the life of a young nobleman. He had had a sufficient allowance of money, augmented by his mother's giving up part of her own income for his education and pleasures. He had kept his horses, although never an accomplished rider, and he passed for a sportsman. In two branches—swimming and boxing—he was really expert, and during his vacation runs up to London he had made close acquaintance with the racketty night-life of the town. He knew his way about shady taverns, frequented the opera, and cut an elaborate figure in Fops' Alley. In those days every young man with any pretensions to fashion patronised the Fancy, and Byron enjoyed not only the tuition but the friendship of Gentleman Jackson, who heartily admired his pupil. For this part of his education Byron was commended by Christopher North, who was himself by way of being a bruiser, although he too was lame. Of the flash dialect of low life the poet's knowledge was extensive and peculiar; and on this side of his character he answers to his own description, "so prime, so swell, so nutty and so knowing. " If there be **any** gemxnan so ignorant as to require a traduction,"

160

THE AWAKENING TO FAME

he is referred respectfully to " Don Juan/' Note 79, where he .will be further directed.

The two Cruikshanks, illustrating the midnight adventures of Tom and Jerry, threw into relief the elegant dandyism of these gentlemen against the tag-rag and bobtail and frowsy slovenliness of their chance associates in haunts like the Cock and Hen Club and the Fancy Dress Ball in the neighbourhood of Rag Fair. After an evening in a fashionable gambling-hell or at the play, the young bloods adjourned to the gin-shop, where the amusement was directly proportional to the rowdyism and disrepute of the company. The swells talked the language of the place : mine host was known as the gin-spinner, and his customers called for their refreshment in the right technical terms, " Blue Ruin " and " Max "—the last familiar to Byron and immortalised by him. To the humbler part of the company, the visitors from higher regions were known as " well-breeched swells." They carried with them some touch of the tradition of St. James's; and those who in their own sphere shone at Almack's distinguished themselves equally at All-Max in the East: to wit, the Coach and Horses in Nightingale Lane, East Smithfield. The soft whisperings of the modish fair in the King Street rooms were parodied in the east by the blandishments of demireps who " were all nutty upon them." Further west there were haunts of the same kind, more fashionable, but equally unedifying. Stevens's in Bond Street and Limmer's in Conduit Street lightened the tedium;

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

but even over these resorts that strict moralist, Mr. Thomas Moore, heaves a sigh. He did not think that these places were a good training-ground for the poet, and possibly he is right.¹ Byron was on terms familiar with Tom Cribb, the pugilist, and used to dine at his house, The Union Arms, at the corner of Oxendon Street and Panton Street, Haymarket. The entertainment there was not entirely gastronomic, for the poet and his host used to talk confidentially on matters as intimate as Mr. Cribb's conjugal embarrassments, of which the author of "Childe Harold" has left an illuminating record. The prospect of a meal at Cribb's stimulated philosophical reflection. At a later period he wrote : " I shall dine at Crib's [*sic*] to-morrow, I like energy—even animal energy—of all kinds; and I have need of both mental and corporeal. I have not dined out, nor, indeed *at all* lately : have heard no music—have seen nobody. Now for a *plunge*—high life and low life. Amant *alterna* Camoense."

These accomplishments of the select mobility were no real drawback to a young man now entering the circles of the select nobility, for it was quite understood that polite and even dandified persons should make touch with the underworld. No buck was complete without it. The underworld was perhaps the less dangerous arena. Merely fashionable society, apart from its small intellectual circles, retained beneath its veneer a large

¹ See description of Limmer's, " the dirtiest hotel in London " : " Reminiscences of Captain Gronow." Vol. I, p. 54,

THE AWAKENING TO FAME

measure **of** the coarseness **and** the dissolute habits of the earlier Georgian period. Byron himself saw through the hollowness of contemporary manners, and declared that the refinement of latter days was perhaps the consequence of a vice which wished to mask and soften itself, as much as virtuous civilisation. He referred to his own times as " this immaculate period, this moral millennium, of expurgated editions in books, manners and Royal Trials of Divorce. This laudable delicacy,—this crying out elegance of the day . . . is not a whit more moral than, and not half so honourable as, the coarser candour of our less polished ancestors."

The Prince Regent had imported a spurious polish, which he had acquired in his gay passages with Philippe Egalite, a quasi-democrat like himself. It was in its way a brilliant society, full of life and colour, fond of the sound of revelry by night, and even its less weighty members were superficially interested in art and letters. It had thrown off one strange scion, a creature frivolous, clever, imaginative, passionate and, to a limited degree, intellectual: a woman in many respects before her time, whose extravagances would scarcely be remarked to-day, and certainly not reprobated : a wonder, a beauty and **a** terror, and withal a menace to the peace of the new genius whom destiny had thrust into the vortex.

But even Regency society had its more staid aspect: there were families, both in town and country, where the moral law was still honoured in the observance rather **than** in the breach, where the men " in wisdom's ways

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

did **take** delight," and their women were "as pure as sanctity itself from vice." One of these, "of the best class and better than her class," but still within the circle of the poet's new intimates, was yet to cross his orbit and work even greater disturbance there than the mercurial woman.

In the world he had now entered Byron moved with outward ease, but inward disquiet. He carried heavy handicaps : his physical disability kept him on tenter-hooks of wounded self-consciousness, and he was sensitively aware that, in spite of the birth and education of a gentleman, he was a *parvenu*, almost an outsider, whose present position had been won, not by inheritance, but by the contemptible art of a scribbler. He was in Society on sufferance, not as a matter of course; he had to learn new ways, to catch a new tone. Until he became famous his social surroundings had been very different from those in which he now moved. Between the gossipy tea-drinking and dances of his mother's middle-class set in Southwell and the brilliant and exclusive assemblies of a Lady Jersey—who could, on a point of regulation costume, turn even Wellington away from the door of Almack's—there was a great gulf fixed. In Southwell professional society a plain, untitled gentlewoman who had a lord to her son was a person of consequence, and said son was treated with rather overdone deference and submission. Here in aristocratic London the lord was but one of many, and titles, as such, were important only in the eyes or on the tongues

164

THE AWAKENING TO FAME

of menials. At Burgage Manor and at Newstead, Byron and his -mother had never made their way in county society. He had formed friendships with his peers at Harrow, but it is not recorded that these passionate attachments led to holiday invitations. The Carlisles held aloof. Augusta was the one link with kinsfolk of the great world, but her efforts to reconcile her brother with his guardian had only a partial success. Before the year 1812 English nobility knew not Byron except by hearsay. Although he had already caused some slight stir as a satirical rhymster, that was not enough to make hostesses eager for his company. After "Hours of Idleness" appeared, Jean Duchess of Gordon had wished to know "my poetical lordship," but he was "engaged on an excursion," and before another chance offered Her Grace was gone into Scotland. The Duchess's interest was not entirely literary—something there was in it of family feeling and former ties, for Mrs. Byron had stayed frequently with the Duchess in her girlhood;¹ but the overture was not made until the young lion had begun to roar. Underlying resentment to the mixed motives of a kinswoman's belated notice can be traced clearly in the mocking account of the incident Byron gave to his Southwell friend, Miss Pigot: "I have postponed my introduction till the winter when I shall favour the lady, *whose taste I shall not dispute*, with my most sublime and edifying conversation." Against the world that now took the poet to its arms he **had**

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

registered a few black marks, the memory of which remained amid all present flattery. He, Lord Byron of Newstead and a Gordon, *atavis editus regibus*, had been a neglected nobody. The memory did nothing to alleviate his natural shyness. Nor was he the person to reflect that his position required some backing of personal merit and accomplishment to win him recognition by his social equals.

He listened, none the less, with a ready ear to the sirens' song. With all his handicaps, his social gifts were not few, and his personal charm completed the success his genius had inaugurated. That charm, however, found its best opportunity in a small company; *tete-a-tete* it was fatal, and soon his path was strewn, not with roses only, but with the wreckage of hearts. He wished, at a later period, that

. . . womankind had but one rosy mouth
To kiss them all at once from North to South.

But he was not always left to take the initiative, and many of the women whom his fascination drove to despair had themselves alone to blame. He could not, with the best will in the world, love them all : he could not return the passion of every dazzled being who flung herself at his head. The chief of these impetuous and gratuitous adorers was more unfortunately fortunate than the ruck of her sisters—to her own and his undoing. That passion was like the letting-out of water—incalculable in its devastation. In its train it carried even

166

THE AWAKENING TO FAME

worse happenings, for it led, through the promptings of a Mephistopheles in petticoats, to the final disaster. The other victim of that ill-fated alliance cannot be accused of indiscreet overtures : she certainly waited to be asked; but" she was not insensible to the glamour of the poet's fame and personality, which dulled for her the warnings of her puritanical and rigid nature. Her intellect was flattered by a proposal from the greatest poet of the day : perhaps her heart, too, yielded to those arts of amorous persuasion which he could exercise even where (as here) he did not deeply love.

At the first offer she refused. Piqued, he returned, after various interludes, to the siege. Pity for both that the power she afterwards displayed of obstinate persistence in what she believed to be her duty should have failed her at this pinch ! Perhaps it was love, after all, that drove Anne Isabella Milbanke to take the step that wrecked her own and Byron's life. Or was it merely that a girl of considerable intellectual attainments could not deny herself the triumph of capturing for a husband the man whose intellect had made him the chief object of literary homage ? The question will never be answered, but it suggests that Lady Byron, not less than the other disappointed women, fell victim as much to Byronism as to Byron. That she did not surrender at the first time of asking is proof of her misgiving (for she was not one to condescend to the usual tactics of the coquette). Her sheltered life did not prevent her from knowing those traits of Byron's character which were utterly alien

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

and repugnant to her* Even her rigidly virtuous surroundings could not keep that knowledge from Isabella. She had at least two kinswomen to whom such things appeared no more than commonplace. The elder—old enough at sixty-two to know better—regarded them as the half-humorous peccadilloes of young gallantry; the younger, as inevitable adjuncts to the art of adventurous living.

It used to be matter for debate whether Byron was received into the "best set." That is of little moment to-day, but within a year of the poet's death Sir Egerton Brydges¹ thought it worth while to traverse the question. His argument led him no further than the truism that the limits of the alleged "first set" cannot be rigidly or accurately defined. While he ventures no opinion as to the relative moral worth of the contending divisions, he makes it clear that "a *certain set* were exceedingly angry that it should be thought that Lord Byron was *one of them!* or that he should be able to communicate, by his conversations, any knowledge of the manners, habits and opinions of these *elect*." What Byron has communicated indicates that he touched many sets: some sufficiently high, others of less consideration. He seems to have drawn no hard-and-fast lines, and to have been as ubiquitous as Sheridan. Of that gifted boon-companion he says: "I have met him in all places and parties—at Whitehall, with the Melbournes, at the Marquis of Tavistock's, at Robbins's the auctioneer's, at

¹ Brydges: "An Impartial Portrait of Lord Byron," 1825.

THE AWAKENING TO FAME

Sir Humphry Davy's, at Sam Rogers's—in short, in most kinds of company." Byron knew the Spencers, the Greys, Lady Jersey and Lady Cowper, the Lansdownes, the Staffords, the Hollands, the Heathcotes, the Oxfords and the Harrowbys—Lady Harrowby, " one of the exquisites "; but in the high Whig world his closest intimacy was reserved for Lady Melbourne and the more doubtful and rapid circle of her daughter-in-law, Lady Caroline Lamb. Lady Melbourne's niece—the pretty precisian, Miss Milbanke—came in as an aside, a piquant contrast.

Mere lionisation cannot last for ever : a single season, and it begins to wear threadbare. This Byron recognised very well in retrospect when he wrote of " the fashionable world of London of which I then formed an item, a fraction, the segment of a circle, the unit of a million, the nothing of something . . . I had been the lion of 1812 : Miss Edgeworth and Madame de Stael, with ' the Cossack ' towards the end of 1813 were the exhibitions of the succeeding year." But a lion, although he may lose his lionship, has it in his power to secure his place in society and become something better than a mere exhibition. This Byron failed to achieve. During 1813 his star passed its zenith, and there are signs that his conduct was preparing the way for that revulsion of feeling which is commonly supposed to date from the failure of his marriage, with its miserable attendant circumstances. He was not making progress with those best fitted to help him; on the contrary, " he was becoming more

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

entangled in a social circle whose code of morality was lax even judged by the standard of the Regency period."¹ From these intimacies sprang a new crop of love-affairs, dubious and futile. If in one case he loved sincerely a woman who might have given him happiness, that happiness could have been secured only by the pair first braving a public scandal—the lady was already a wife. The attachment inspired some fine verses, but its disappointment added another to Byron's many wounds, and increased the confusion and perplexity of the labyrinth of love. No Ariadne appeared to provide him with the clue. The myth of Theseus was remotely in the mind of the Duchess of Devonshire when she wrote of Byron : " The ladies, I hear, spoil him and the gentlemen are jealous of him. He is going back to Naxos and then the Husbands may sleep in peace." That was in 1812; in 1814 the phrase would have been even more appropriate. Several more dovecotes had been fluttered, and Byron himself, restless, dissatisfied and uneasy, was again turning his thoughts to foreign travel; he had, however, another project. He would range himself—marry and settle down. That way, he fancied, salvation lay. He must find, above all things, a woman capable of guiding him. He was right; but those who review his life at the distance of a century may be pardoned for thinking that the task lay beyond human power.

I John Murray: " Lord Byron's Correspondence."

XI. THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

THE Furies that pursued Byron from the cradle to the grave were more than the ancient three in number. When he was twenty-five he invoked the fiercest of them : *Diva potens Cypri!* From her he had already suffered much; and in the same year, looking back upon his life, he exclaimed : "At five and twenty, when the better part of Ufe is over, one should be *something*;—and what am I? nothing but five and twenty—and the odd months. What have I seen? the same man all over the world,—aye, and woman too."

His heredity foredoomed him to a disastrous experience in affairs of the heart. The descendant of a profligate line, it is said, is born with stronger passions but a weaker will. Even the virtue of his mother was no protection; the family history on her side of the house played too strong a part, and the mingling of the Byrons and the Gordons doubled the handicap. The results declared themselves early and unmistakably, even in the age of innocence. Before he had passed out of infancy there were strange and precocious signs of perils in store. The boy, not knowing what had befallen him, formed a guileless attachment, accompanied by feelings of an intensity beyond his years. He was awake, if not to

BYEON IN PERSPECTIVE

passion, certainly to an overstrained sensibility, which, in retrospect, he knew for love. "How very odd that I should have been so utterly, devotedly fond of that girl at an age when I could neither feel passion nor know the meaning of the word. I have been attached fifty times since that period : yet I recollect all we said to each other, all our caresses, her features, my restlessness, sleeplessness, my tormenting my mother's maid to write for me to her, which she at last did to quiet me. Poor Nancy thought I was wild, and, as I could not write for myself, became my secretary. I remember too, our walks and the happiness of sitting by Mary in the children's apartment at their house not far from the Plain-stones at Aberdeen, while her lesser sister played with the doll and we sat gravely making love, in our way. How the deuce did all this occur, where could it originate? I certainly had no sexual ideas for years afterwards; and yet my misery, my love for that girl was so violent that I sometimes doubt if I have ever been really attached since." The modern psychologist has no difficulty in tracing the origin of embryonic passions. Attachments of this kind are far from uncommon, and even young children know the innocent raptures of proximity to some beloved thing or idea or sentiment (such as religion) or person, and the pain—amounting sometimes even to desolation—when the object is removed. In a child so young as Byron it was an accident that fastened his affections on a little girl : it might have been any of the other objects named;

172

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

but the hereditary predisposition made him exceptionally susceptible to the other sex. So far it was fictitious, but the fundamental reality declared itself in after years in the agony he endured on hearing of Mary Duff's marriage. "At that moment," he says, "my feelings nearly threw me into convulsions." The last word is noteworthy; he used it almost invariably to describe emotions of this kind; and once, when a woman observed him without his knowledge in one of these fits, she told him afterwards that he appeared convulsed. He has left the significant confession : "All convulsions end for me in rhyme."

Mary Duff was not the impressionable boy's only attachment in Scotland. There was another Mary—Mary Robertson, the heroine of "When I roved a young Highlander" : a poem which was long supposed to refer to his cousin—but this was a less poignant affair, though he has left a little prose portrait of the girl, whom he never forgot. She was a passing acquaintance, made during holidays on Deeside, and a good deal older than the poet. Of this incident he has given no analysis, and the Mary Duff passage remains the key to his later emotional history.

In ordinary boys these young likings have no devastating after-effects : they come and go like the wind in the grass; it sways, but recovers by its own resilience. On this not-ordinary boy the experience left a mental lesion. The counterfeit love, when repeated, deepened the scar. Byron's next recorded passion of boyhood

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

caught him after he came to England, when he met his charming cousin, Margaret Parker. He was then about twelve, and she a year older. On this he is again analytical, and confesses a parallel to the symptoms of his first love : " My passion had its usual effects upon me—I could not sleep—I could not eat—I could not rest; and although I had reason to know that she loved me, it was the texture of my life to think of the time which must elapse before we could meet again, being usually about twelve hours of separation; but I was a fool then, and am not much wiser now." Margaret led Byron to make his " first dash into poetry." The verses are lost; but on her death in 1802 he made an attempt at an elegy—" a very dull one"—which found a place as the opening poem of " Hours of Idleness."

Although intense within its limits, Byron's affection for Margaret Parker was still indeterminate. It was not the full awakening, although, as he was at the time a Harrow boy, he cannot have been in the state of paradisial innocence which he claims for the Aberdeen period; but his account of the next disturbance acknowledges a crucial development. It was, as Moore says, " to exercise a lasting and paramount influence over the whole of his subsequent character and career. His love for Mary Chaworth, the heiress of Annesley—an estate adjoining Newstead—was that of a man. Miss Chaworth was two years his senior, and received a schoolboy's adoration with the tolerant amusement usual to girls of that age in such a situation. She liked him enough to

174

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

be kind to him, and he—poor lad!—built castles in the air and fed his now morbid sentimentality on her passing graciousness. Of the havoc it wrought on his sensibilities he has left a strange record, easily understood by those who have known the foolish ecstasies of such accidental contact. His affliction on that occasion was light, however, compared with that in store for him. During the idyllic six weeks of the holiday time he spent in Mary's company, his morbid self-love was often wounded to desperation. He could not dance, and to see Mary the partner of another awoke bitter and brooding resentment. Byron did not dream how wide was the gulf that separated him from Miss Chaworth. She at seventeen was already a woman of the world, with all that that implies. In her eyes Byron was a mere schoolboy, and still very much the rough Highland colt at that. He was fat; his manners as yet left something to be desired. As a lover, he did not even come within the range of Mary's remotest thoughts. Here Fate gave him one of her sorest buffets, for he learned accidentally how he appeared to her : " Do you think I could care anything for that lame boy ? " It was " like a shot through his heart." He ran out of the house and never stopped till he found himself at Newstead. Mary's marriage to John Musters, a fox-hunting squire, in the following year, cost Byron precisely the same miseries as the announcement of Mary Duff's; but he was older now, and he carried it off with at least the appearance of bravado. That was not the end : long afterwards Mary crossed his

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

path again; but on the advice of his sister, Augusta, he held aloof. This fact has only recently been ascertained,¹ and disproves conclusively one of those fantastic and disagreeable myths with which Byron's history is encumbered. The Chaworth incident left a wound that was never healed, but " he learned in suffering what he taught in song," and at " The Dream "—the poetical record of this episode—even Mr. Saintsbury forbears to cavil.

The wound, although too ostentatiously paraded as the reason for Byron's first retreat from England, was deep : not so deep, however, as to deter the poet from lighter dalliance abroad. During his Cambridge days he had taken the finer edge off his feelings by dissipation, to which he was still a stranger when he lost Miss Chaworth. Hence an easier inconstancy, reflected in Don Juan's ineffectual impulse to remember Haidee. The interludes of Spain and Greece remain conjectural. Byron records only evasions—one serious, the rest serio-comic. The idyllic passage with the maids of Athens is on another plane, appropriate to Plato's city. No wounds were taken in that encounter, which stands outside the circle of devastating passions. The affair is as light, easy-moving, innocent and agreeable as the thin but " catchy " little song it inspired : fictitious, too, like so many of Byron's emotions; for there seems to have been really no heart given, and therefore none to give back or keep in exchange.

1 See " Lord Byron's Correspondence."

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

The serious evasion—the adventure with "Florence"* (Mrs. Spencer Smith) at Malta—finds its parallel at a later period. In the former case he trumpets the magnanimity of his self-denying ordinance in verse; in the latter he contents himself with plain epistolary prose, although the passion and the disappointment (as distinct from the heroic act of voluntary separation) inspired "The Bride of Abydos," the Dedication to "The Corsair" and several lyrics. This passion came late in the period of lionisation by English society, and, save for a hint or two of the poet's living "in amity" with persons unnamed, was the last before his marriage. It had been preceded by the fascination of Lady Oxford and the tremendous duel of love and hate with Lady Caroline Lamb—the most vehement and complex emotional entanglement of Byron's career. It is reckoned among his great passions, but it was far stronger on the woman's part than on the man's. How far Byron was overwhelmed, or how far he was merely yielding to the tempting and *outré* amusement of holding to his will the most capricious, attractive and unusual woman of her time, is an insoluble problem. He had now become so practised in intrigue that the power of sincere and enduring attachment must have been considerably the worse for wear. Far earlier he had prated, rather youthfully, of the sickness of satiety. The confessions are discounted by the long array of subsequent indulgences. It was not until the very end of the London period, when he decided that it was time to marry some good

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

woman, who would be his guide, philosopher, friend and (above all) controller, that the impeachments of gallantry as a delusion and a snare need be taken at something approaching their face value. The adulation and the too-easy conquests offered to Byron on his entrance to the world of fashion had dulled his perceptions. Never scrupulous, he became for a time still more cynically careless as he passed from adventure to light adventure. It is a harsh saying, but even his renunciation of Lady Frances Wedderburn-Webster bears the stamp, not of the virtue he fondly believed or claimed, but of a subtle progress in depravity. The passage has a disquieting resemblance to an exposition by Laclos, and a note in Byron's *Journal* throws the incident into sinister relief. That entry in the *Journal* was written during the last months of 1818—the very time when the Wedderburn-Webster complication had just closed, except for lingering regrets. The whole correspondence with Lady Melbourne, in which every fresh adventure is confessed with fluent pen, betrays Byron in a mood of abandonment to which he sank at no other time. It is darker even than the coarse and blatant recreations of Venice, for it is more subtle.

The influence of Lady Caroline Lamb had done its work. Although he was now struggling to free himself from her persistent and exasperating persecution, that was not from any exalted motive, but simply because her presence had become highly compromising to a

178

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

young man whose intention was to settle in life with all possible speed. The necessity therefore for preserving, as far as in him lay, his good name involved endless worries, and Byron's desperation, which he carried with a brave and mocking face, may explain, though it cannot excuse, those other amorous divagations in which he seems to have sought relief. The picture is unflattering.

Almost daily, from September 1812 to April 1815, Byron wrote to Lady Melbourne an instalment of his *Chronique Scandaleuse*. From her he seems to have concealed nothing. No doubt the very act of putting his troubles on paper—intuitional psycho-analysis—brought him comfort. He has been blamed for an ultra-cynicism in these frank revelations of designs upon hearts the law forbade him to assail, but he was often at his wits' end when Caro. had sprung some fresh mine upon him, and, above all, the poet needed sympathy. The man who wrote :

All who joy would win, must share it

may have thought also that a pain shared was a pain assuaged. Of Lady Melbourne's letters in reply, few are extant, but not infrequently the drift of her correspondence can be caught from Byron's. In the management of his escape from Lady Caroline she gave him sound enough advice and such practical help as lay in her power. The wisdom of another part of her advice remains problematic, for she was mainly instrumental in bringing about his marriage with her niece, Miss Mil-

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

banke. Byron and his mentor leaped to immediate intimacy and formed one of the strangest friendships in the whole range of literary biography. She sympathised with him, but whether she fully understood him is another question. What began with regard soon passed to affection of the kind that often springs up between an experienced woman of the world and a young, distinguished and attractive man. If Byron conquered Lady Melbourne, she in turn conquered him. " To Lady Melbourne I write with most pleasure—and her answers, so sensible, so *tactique*—I never met with half her talent. If she had been a few years younger, what a fool she would have made of me, had she thought it worth her while—and I should have lost a valuable and most agreeable *friend*. Mem. A mistress never is nor can be a friend. While you agree you are lovers; and when it is over, anything but friends."

Perhaps Lady Melbourne, without intending it, did make a fool of Byron. She fell in with his mood, and unconsciously drew him on to the most intimate self-revelation. Her few letters betray an indiscretion that must have given him just the sort of stimulus that he appreciated, and lured him to confessions of an Augustinian candour. Throughout the correspondence, for all its gravity of subject-matter, both parties maintained the tone of the Comedy of Manners with that touch of unreality which makes scandal endurable and gives to transgression the remoteness of fiction. In that respect Lady Melbourne's influence was subtly deleterious:

180

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

Byron was her fool, perhaps her victim, but neither realised it, and, had they done so, Lady Melbourne at least would have received an unpleasant shock, for her intentions were entirely benevolent. She thought she had befriended this young man, so gifted, so noble, so fascinating, so wayward, so tossed upon a sea of troubles. Those troubles, too, were largely due to her daughter-in-law, and the mentor may have felt that the family owed the poet any reparation that lay in her power to make. Her method was, to say the least, peculiar; and, as it turned out, tragically ineffectual.

If Byron was the victim and the fool of Lady Melbourne, she did not altogether escape a similar fate at his hands. In the *espibglerie* and badinage of their letters and conversations, Byron inevitably played a part of mock-heroic gallantry. He was devoted, playfully adoring, to "ma tante"—a dangerous game to play with a woman whose day is almost over, but who still, like all her sex, clings with the fierceness of despair to the remnants of her power over men. Who knows what secret, not-to-be-confessed flutterings the poet aroused in that elderly heart? At sixty-two fate had brought her an unlooked-for opportunity, a new stimulus, and the stimulus that, of all others, every woman of her day, old and young, coveted most ardently. Lady Melbourne, with Byron at her feet, enjoying this late adventure, in delicious *tête-à-tête* or in the most confidential and perilous correspondence woman ever received, may be pardoned if in her heart of hearts she indulged heaven

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

knows what dreams. Not hopes, certainly—for she had a sense of humour, and the relationship was touched by no breath of scandal—but pleasing assurances that her charm was not yet impotent. In her admonitory adventure, Lady Melbourne was another victim, not of Byron but of Byronism. She lived in a legend : she was a sharer, perhaps the sole sharer, in the central mystery of the poet's life.

What that mystery was, it is idle and unjust to speculate. Something there was that Byron confessed, some deep and secret distress that he was anxious to explain away; but the allusions, the incoherencies, the poet's habit of setting up fictitious situations, reduce every apparent admission far below the level of conclusive evidence. The question is better left alone. It may be that in another hundred years, when documents still unpublished have come to light, the world may be able to give a verdict of condemnation or acquittal on a charge which may or may not be hinted at in certain passages of the Melbourne correspondence. The importance or necessity of further investigation is, however, doubtful. There would be little loss to the world if an old precedent were followed and further papers were " submitted," as Petrarch said, " to Vulcan's revision." One fault more or less does not matter. Enough is already known of Byron's virtues and his vices, and on these posterity will dwell far less than on what may be enduring in his poetry.

Lady Melbourne meant well in playing *directrix*

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

amatoria to Byron; but it may be that the circumstances of her benevolent action, with their strange and somewhat perverse excitement, had warped her judgment. It is difficult otherwise to explain her deliberate making of the disastrous match between the poet and her niece. She knew both their characters, as far as any human being could know them, to the last detail; and either she was morally blinded or she had become for the moment a little fatuous when she persuaded herself that the union of two such hopeless incompatibles could have had any happy result. It was a failure in common sense; the question of Byron's private life was little likely to distress her—she was a child of the eighteenth century : a woman of the Regency. Even then she had her misgivings, betrayed by her obvious relief when Byron's first letters to her after his marriage gave her " so good an account of Annabella. You seem altogether mighty comfortable, which delights me."

The situation was to become mighty uncomfortable. In little more than a year that disastrous marriage and its consequences had driven Byron into perpetual exile, where he sought consolation, or at any rate distraction, in a long series of amorous adventures, all ignoble, some sordid, and only one lightened by any redeeming touch. Even that attachment was, at its best, but a miserable bondage against which his spirit was ultimately to rebel. The most that can be said for his passage with the Countess Guiccioli is that it won him from worse entanglements and from a course of reckless and defiant

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

dissipation which threatened to make a speedy end of him. Into the details of the most inappropriate and squalid affairs it is unnecessary to enter at this time of day. They have already retreated far towards merited oblivion. Yet even when he was ensnared in the toils of Jane Clairmont in Switzerland, or the slave to the Venetian Aphrodite Pandemos, his contradictory genius could resist influences that would have blighted a less vital intellect. During the period of greatest abandonment he produced the third canto of "Childe Harold," "The Prisoner of Chillon," "The Dream," "Darkness," "The Epistle to Augusta," "Churchill's Grave," and part of "Manfred," also "The Lament of Tasso," the fourth canto of "Childe Harold," "Beppo," "Mazeppa," and the first two cantos of "Don Juan." It is true that, if his own accounts are to be believed, his life during the greater part of that period was such as to make high efforts of original genius almost an impossibility; but he was always inclined to make the worst of himself, and therefore here, as in so many other instances, it is necessary to allow a considerable discount. Shelley's testimony upon the darkest side of Byron's life in Venice is a manifest exaggeration, and part of it at least must be entirely discredited. The poet himself seems to have had the power of throwing off the influence of his grosser moments. He indicates, indeed, a distinct cleavage between these and the periods of inspiration—another proof of his amazing versatility. "My poesie," he says, "is the dream of my sleeping

184

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

Passions, when they are awake I cannot speak their language, only in their Somnolency." In this regard therefore the flowers of his genius during a period of so many dark interludes is the less surprising.

He was dependent upon women, and made, as Moore notes, continual reference to them in every experience. " There is something to me very softening in the presence of a woman, some strange influence even if one is not in love with them, which I cannot at all account for, having no very high opinion of the sex." He notes elsewhere that he is a Turk in his notions about woman-kind. " But yet," he adds, " I always feel in better humour with myself and everything else if there is a woman within ken." And again—" I do not know that I am happiest when alone, but this I am sure of, that I never am long in the society of her I love (God knows too well and the devil probably too) without a yearning for the company of my lamp, and my utterly confused and tumbled-over library." This passage indicates his faculty of returning from amorous adventures suddenly to throw off the influence and even the memory of those passages, and betake himself straightway to the practice of literature. Too much should not be made of his own statements about himself and his ways, for every single confession is the outcome of a single intense mood, vividly felt, and profoundly believed in—for the moment. But there is a uniformity in his accounts of himself from which it is possible to strike an average, and in that average one may come fairly near the truth.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

It was not in his nature to be constant to any one attachment; such constancy as he possessed was reserved for another object—his poetry. There he could enjoy the ideal after which he sought in vain among his fellow creatures. "Not even that intense craving after affection which nature had implanted in him could keep his ardour still alive in a pursuit whose results fell so short of his * imaginings "; and though from time to time the combined warmth of his fancy and temperament was able to call up a feeling which to his eyes wore the semblance of love, it may be questioned whether his heart had ever much share in such passions or whether, after his first launch into the boundless sea of imagination, he could ever have been brought back and fixed by any lasting attachment. Actual objects there were, in but too great number, who, as long as the illusion continued, kindled up his thoughts and were the themes of his song, but they were, after all, little more than mere dreams of an hour,"¹

Even the least worthy objects were exalted to an absurd and quite disproportionate pitch of idealisation. Of one of the least of his passing fancies he could write, "I have fallen in love, fathomless love. . . . She is pretty as an antelope, is but two and twenty years old, has the large black oriental eyes, with the Italian countenance and dark glossy hair, of the curl and colour of Lady Jersey's, then she has the voice of a lute and the song of a seraph (though not quite so sacred), besides

I Moore: "Life of Byron." Chap. XXIII.

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

a long postscript of graces, virtues, and accomplishments, enough to furnish out a new chapter of Solomon's Song." This rhapsody carries with it its own characteristic discounts. He meant it all, while he was actually setting down the rhapsodic descriptions, but he cannot evade the everlasting recurrence to the mocking or half-burlesque qualification. He begs leave to tell his correspondent, Mr. Murray, lest he should have conjured up visions of princesses or countesses, that his goddess is only the wife of a Merchant of Venice, and the last note of correction with the inevitable note of egotism runs, with reference to the lady's graces and merits : " but her great merit is finding out mine—there is nothing so amiable as discernment." An old pose, this : compare the Duchess of Gordon episode.

Occasionally, although he hated an "*esprit* in petticoats " (by one account), he was attracted by literary graces in womankind. There is a glimpse of a moment when the enjoyment was heightened by a common interest in a classical author. Lady Oxford gave the poet a thrill when she said, " Have we not passed our last month like the gods of Lucretius? " and Byron notes with evident satisfaction that the lady is well acquainted with that poet in the original. But, during the Venetian period, owing perhaps to the smaller erudition of the wife of the Merchant of Venice, he tells Mr. Murray another story. " I am still dreadfully in love with the Adriatic lady, whom I spake of in a former letter (and not in this—I add, for fear of mistakes, for the only

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

one mentioned in the first part of this epistle is elderly and bookish, two things which I have ceased to admire), and love in this part of the world is no sinecure. This is also the season when everybody make up their intrigues for the ensuing year, and cut for partners for the next deal."

Byron was never unconscious of the absurdity that underlay his relations with women, especially when he was called in, as sometimes happened, to advise some husband whose adventures had got him into a scrape. The unfortunate friend was no doubt moved in his choice of a counsellor by a rooted persuasion of that counselor's profound experience in the weightier or lighter matters of the heart. One of the clients, a typical man of the Regency, of whom, in many sly asides, the poet made sad game, besought his advice in a particularly worrying entanglement. The affair was farcical, rather dismally and unpleasantly farcical, for at the moment Byron was living under the man's roof, and making violent love to his wife. Nevertheless, he put his ripest wisdom at the other man's disposal, and gave him sensible enough direction. He was not blind, however, to the essential hypocrisy of the position. "I am a pretty fellow," he notes in his Journal apropos of a similar affair, "I am a pretty fellow truly to lecture about 'the sect.' No matter, my counsels are all thrown away."

These interludes of cynical inconstancy, with his own sardonic comments, grow more frequent after he had been caught in the vortex of London society, and they

188

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

are indicative of the gradual **and** insidious corruption his nature underwent during that period. To his two earliest loves—the one of childhood, and the other of boyhood—he remained undeniably faithful in spirit, if not in action. There was no reason why he should be faithful in action, for they had passed beyond the possibility of any fulfilment. In the former case, fulfilment was out of the question; and in the latter, circumstances had finally robbed it of hope. But if ever Byron cherished two pure ideals, they were Mary Duff and Mary Chaworth. They stood always outside the pale of the material. His attachment to Lady Frances Wedderburn-Webster remained also in the last resort un-material, and it has been suggested that this was indeed the love of his life; but it came too late for that, and belongs, as has been shown, to a period when the first fine vision was sadly sullied. The circumstances, too, make his renunciation in this case open to grave question, for it was not an act of pure self-sacrifice on his part; from the mere withdrawal he probably derived a perverse satisfaction greater than that of actual conquest.

Throughout this variety of experience, this paradoxical being believed that his true vocation was that of an exemplary domestic character. He sought it diligently, and thus brought upon himself the crowning disaster of his life. But even after that storm had passed and flung him up like wreckage on the shores of the Adriatic, he reverted once more to an absurd and pathetic parody of respectable married life. Respectable is only a relative

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

term, for, viewed in its best light, the Guiccioli affair was disreputable enough, but it saved him from something worse, and brought him to a more sane and rational way of life. The Countess Guiccioli played her part with the good conscience the customs of her country permitted, and although Byron groaned in bondage and found his chains at last too irksome to be borne, the more tranquil and physically healthy period gave him space for reflection. At Pisa and Ravenna he regained the power, which had otherwise been hopelessly sapped, of taking a detached view of himself. It might yet be possible to retrieve his career, and gradually he saw his way. Intellectually, Madame Guiccioli had little or nothing to give him. She was a fond, foolish woman who set up an impossible ideal of Byron's character, but something he must have owed to her simple belief in his goodness. Doubtless he smiled at it in secret, yet the smile cannot have been wholly cynical, for otherwise there could have been no beneficial results. Madame Guiccioli's influence on his work was disadvantageous, for she checked his full self-expression. But for one thing she deserves credit. Although peace was incompatible with Byron's nature, from the tranquillity which Madame Guiccioli gave the poet from promiscuous and ruinous attachments he derived a power to renew belief in himself, and the resolution to take the final step in his career.

It is the last paradox of a paradoxical life that in a love affair of no great intrinsic consequence, the bonds-

190

THE BONDSMAN OF LOVE

man of love should have found the opportunity to throw off his fetters and give the world some proof of his nobler self. Fate ordained that it should be only a glimpse, but even that partial revelation, in spite of so much that remains speculative, is the key to Byron's true character.

XII. THE INCOMPATIBLES

IF ever a marriage was foredoomed to failure it was

Even had his character been that of an irreproachable husband in point of conventional morality, he and Anniabella Milbanke could never have found happiness. Although his conduct was no doubt contributory to the separation, it is almost unnecessary to postulate any overt acts of infidelity, to say nothing of any graver fault, such as has been alleged as the main cause. That indeterminate question may very doubtfully be assigned as the head and front of the offending. The chronology of the case seems, on strict examination, to point to a different conclusion. Be that as it may, sufficient grounds are to be found simply in the characters and disposition of the high contracting parties.

The attitude of their approach to marriage was in each case equivocal. Byron, like his father before him, had gone out definitely to hunt for a partner in order that, as he thought, his circumstances might be improved. Captain Byron's aims were entirely cynical and sordid, although he had at least the grace to make no secret of it. It cannot fairly be charged upon his son that he went deliberately fortune-hunting. Money was certainly some object to him, but Miss Milbanke's property was as yet only contingent to several inheritances, and as

THE INCOMPATIBLES

to its extent he was not precisely informed, nor does he seem to have concerned himself very anxiously about it. His main anxiety was to find someone who would be •attractive, intelligent, and, above all, capable of ruling him. There is an irony, almost serio-comic, in the spectacle of this most intractable of men ardently wishing to find a woman who would keep him in order. Evidently Lady Melbourne thought that her niece had the necessary qualifications, or she would not have committed herself to the scheme. Whether Byron really believed that he might safely stake his future on Miss Milbanke is another matter. It cannot be said that he was talked into it, but he yielded to suggestion, and there was to all appearance not a little self-deception in his final resolve to risk the experiment. Self-deception, too, and a yielding to the undeniable flattery of a proposal from such a man, may have coloured the bride's resolution.

There was nothing precipitate about the marriage; Miss Milbanke had refused Byron once, and in that refusal she was truer to herself than in her consent. The laxity of the times found no response in her precise and rigid character; she had very definite ideas of what a husband should be, and she even put them on paper in a letter to her aunt. This, Lady Melbourne, with amazing indiscretion, showed to Byron, who received it good-humouredly enough, but could not deny himself a little flash of his usual sardonic comment. He referred to the document as " Miss Milbanke's plan of a husband," and

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

he confessed frankly that he did not see himself altogether answering to the specification. That was previous to her refusal. Any other man, knowing so well how the land lay and what the lady would exact from the man she married, would have let the matter rest there; but to Byron there was something piquant and stimulating in the refusal. For him denial of a desire only meant a more acute provocation. His mind worked by contraries even within itself and apart from exterior stimulus. Let him but express a violent dislike, and very soon he is found suddenly revising that opinion. He constantly determines to reform, and the very determination switches him off on some new waywardness : thereafter he is all for reform again. And so, although for a time the question of marriage remained in abeyance, it was always present, and he never lost sight of Miss Milbanke as a possible wife. After one or two interludes with women whom the law had already put out of his reach, the project took definite shape once more. With Lady Melbourne's assistance he gained his point.

Annabella's consent once given, there was nothing for Byron but to carry the matter through. If this reading of his character be correct, not even Dante's pen could depict the inferno through which the poet must have gone on the eve of the irrevocable step. A man of conventional honour could not back out. Probably he had no thoughts of any such retreat, for Byron was no coward; but that did not lighten the misery he must

194

THE INCOMPATIBLES

have endured as the day approached. He had sought a wife who would guide him, but that task would have been possible only to some wise and not too rigidly minded woman of the world—one who could understand, and overlook, and forgive a husband's failings, and would use these forgivenesses with subtle tact to enable her to win him from repetition of the fault. The woman who could manage Byron successfully in marriage had need to be exceptionally gifted; possibly the world held no such character, but she upon whom his choice had fallen had not a single quality that would have made for peace. This cannot have been hidden from him. The tone of his letters immediately preceding the marriage is certainly cheerful: he talks affectionately enough of the girl he had won, praises her gifts and graces, but the words are only a mask. From the moment the bride consented, Byron knew how deep his error had been : he must carry it off as best he might with reassuring words.

Betrayal was inevitable. Such phrases as " I think we all improve and suit very well "—" I endeavour to conform to their [the Milbankes'] habits which is not difficult . . . they are very kind and A. and I of course still kinder. I hope she will be happy. I am sure she can make and keep me so if she likes."¹ These are scarcely the words of a confident bridegroom, and a later remark, five days after the ceremony, is even more significant. " I have great hopes this match will turn

1 Murray: " Lord Byron's Correspondence." Vol I.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

out well. I have found nothing as yet which I could wish changed for the better; but time does wonders so I won't be too hasty in my happiness." That the question of unhappiness should have been present at all in the mind of a five-days⁵ bridegroom is of dubious augury.

In announcing the actual fact of his engagement to Moore, he wrote : " Things may occur to break it off, but I will hope not. In the meantime I tell you, a secret by the by, at least till I know she wishes it to be public, that I have proposed and am accepted. You need not be in a hurry to wish me joy, for one mayn't be married for months.⁵⁵ And to a woman friend he writes : " The moment my business here is arranged, I must set out in a great hurry to be happy. Miss Milbanke is the good natured person who has undertaken me, and of course I am very much in love and as silly as all single gentlemen must be in that sentimental situation. . . . She has no fault except being a great deal too good for me, and that I must pardon, if nobody else should. It might have been two years ago and if it had would have saved me a world of trouble. She has employed the interval in refusing about half a dozen of my friends as she did me once, by the way, and has taken me at last, for which I am very much obliged to her. I wish it was well over, for I do hate bustle, and there is no marrying without some;—and then I must not marry in a black coat they tell me, and I can't bear a blue one.

THE INCOMPATIBLES

" Pray forgive me for scribbling all this nonsense—you know I must be serious all the rest of my life, and this is a parting piece of buffoonery which I write with tears in my eyes expecting to be agitated/'

The sting lies in the words, " I must be serious all the rest of my life."

Of the woman he was about to marry he had written to Moore : " I certainly did not dream that she was attached to me, which it seems she has been for some time. I also thought her of a very cold disposition, in which I was also mistaken. As to her virtues etc., she is a kind of pattern in the North. It is well said that *one* of us is of such fame, since there is a sad deficit in the *morale* of that article upon my part."

Murray described her to James Hogg as " a good mathematician, writes poetry, understands French, Italian, Latin and Greek—she is a most delightful creature and possesses excellent temper and a most inordinate share of good sense." On the face of it, this seemed just the very wife for Byron. The mathematics would not enter largely into community of delights, but, to write poetry, to understand all the languages Byron understood, to be " most delightful," to have an excellent temper and a most inordinate share (she needed it) of good sense, were enough to persuade any onlooker that the omens were propitious. Such qualities go far to excuse Lady Melbourne for her share in the match.

But to the possession of these gifts and graces, Byron came in no joyful mood. His written hilarities scarcely

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

conceal the underlying misgiving that turned before long to actual melancholy. As soon as he was betrothed, he made yet another of his ancient and often repeated resolutions to reform. To keep it meant cutting adrift from his old life and old associates and entering upon a narrow way very little to his inclination. Imagination painted for him the narrowness of that path, which implied a curtailment of liberty his spirit could not endure. And here was no love to sweeten sacrifice. It would be unjust to suppose him insincere in his resolution to turn over a new leaf, but his clear foresight of all that such a step involved, "dejected," as Sir Thomas Browne would say, "his cooled imagination." It reached beyond Miss Milbanke's virtues and accomplishments, and saw only her moral rigidity as a clog upon his future career. He studied his bride in order to understand her disposition, but could not boast much progress. He fears she will not govern him; if so it will not do at all. "However," he wrote to Lady Melbourne just two months before the wedding day, January 2, 1816, "the die is cast; neither party can recede."¹

Of the bride's intimate thoughts during that period, no record (if any exists) has been given to the world. Byron reports that it would not be difficult to prove to a third person that "we appear much attached, I hope permanently so." But his opinion of hope, given some nine months later in another connection, was that "it is nothing but the paint upon the face of Existence : the

1 Murray: "Lord Byron's Correspondence." Vol. I.

THE INCOMPATIBLES

least touch of Truth rubs it off and then we see what a hollow cheeked harlot we have got hold of." In the days just before the marriage, Truth, like Care, rode close behind him and showed him many things to his disquiet. His letters are those of a man who is striving to persuade himself that the worse is the better cause. The forced cheerfulness betrays the Tragic face behind the Comic mask.

Moore gives corroborative evidence. Too much stress, however, must not be laid upon his testimony, striking though it is, for he derives it solely from his recollections of Byron's destroyed Memoirs. The biographer states explicitly that he speaks from memory and not from notes. Still, the account¹ is too circumstantial, too probable, to be seriously inaccurate : " In that Memoir, he describes himself as waking, on the morning of his marriage, with the most melancholy reflections, on seeing his wedding suit spread out before him. In that same mood, he wandered about the grounds alone, till he was summoned for the ceremony, and joined, for the first time on that day, his bride and her family. He knelt down, he repeated the words after the clergyman; but a mist was before his eyes,—his thoughts were elsewhere; and he was awakened by the congratulations of the bystanders, to find that he was—married."

The too obvious reminiscence of the " Dying Gladiator " and the last sentence (which contains a figure plagiarised and elaborated by a later wit) arouse some

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

suspicion that, although in substance the account may be true, Moore dressed up the whole paragraph according to his known practice. The germ of the idea occurs in a letter Byron wrote to him on February 2 : " the treacle-moon is over, and I am awake and find myself married." But even allowing for Moore's picturesque talent and love of effect at the expense of cold fact, the indications of black misgiving are sufficient. One need go no further than the unintentional admissions which bristle in the too jocose and sometimes ribald letters of the Mocking Bridegroom. The whole series is a *Scarronade*.

Married—and awake—Byron's next problem was to find a *modus vivendi*. Perhaps he never tried. Failure from the very outset—there could not be disillusion—is written large over his correspondence. To Lady Melbourne he was of necessity blatant in his assurance that all was well. He loved *ma tante* too sincerely to hurt her. Friend Thomas Moore received similar testimonies, which, like Lancelot Gobbo's father, " do something smack." He is informed on intimate points, the case being supported from Moore's own matrimonial experience. Then Byron became literary, and his allusions betrayed him. " Swift says ^c no wise men ever married,' but for a fool, I think it the most ambrosial of all possible future states." He is ready to take it upon lease and at the expiration renew the term for ninety-nine years.

In his very next paragraph, the ambrosial Benedick

200

THE INCOMPATIBLES

asks eagerly for news of the delights of Town—" what is going on iji the way of intrigue, and how the rogues of the upper Beggar's Opera go on, or rather go off—in or after marriage : or who are going to break any particular commandment." He complains of " this dreary coast," but the sight of the sea is some compensation. There is little to do but pick up shells. Mary Duff is again much in his thoughts; he sends her messages, and remarks that they are now both out of harm's way, should they meet again, which is unlikely. He sighs for a *library*, his only want. With that he can always amuse himself, even if alone.

In the story of Byron's unhappy marriage, a library was to figure again. Madame Guiccioli, sentimental and blindly adoring, is for the most part an untrustworthy witness, but here and there she lets fall a significant remark. " He required to have certain things granted to him : his hours for solitude, the silence of his library which he sometimes preferred even to the society of the woman he loved." The Countess is implying that she herself understood when to make herself scarce, if Lady Byron did not. The denial of solitude was likely to be among the very earliest causes of irritation. Obviously Madame Guiccioli only reflects what she was told, but the reflections are now and then worth a closer consideration just on that account; they betray minute points of grievance and reveal Lady Byron's mental attitude. " He did not," says the Countess, " think his soul lost by going to bed at dawn, for he liked to

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

write at night." The phrase "think his soul lost by going to bed at dawn"—an idea that would never occur to an Italian—echoes a curious scruple peculiar to rigid moralists. A section of these at that period—there may be survivals even to-day—imputed an automatic immorality, beginning about 10 p.m., to those who sit up or stay out late. In Scotland this notion gave rise to the institution known as "elders' hours/* Lady Byron's idea of what a well-ordered household should be was of the kind that treats irregular hours, if not as a scandal and a sin, at least as a serious fault of conduct. Attempts to break the habit are a thing no man of Byron's temperament could endure. And any hint of a moral objection would turn resentment either to silent rage or overt acts of fury.

Byron's misgivings about his marriage were not incompatible with his earlier attitude of kindly tolerance towards his bride. The feeling, although a sad enough makeshift, was one that a less passionate and unstable nature might have disciplined into some sort of harmony with a partner essentially alien. But the irritable race of poets is constitutionally unfitted to resolve domestic discords. And to the poet, or any of the artist breed, the more trivial these discords are, the worse they sting. They are gadflies. The creator, teased in the moment of inspiration by the irrelevant intrusions of a conventional world, takes a wound to self-esteem not to be brooked. What has he done that Fate should put this stumbling block in his way? But he is super-sensitive to

202

THE INCOMPATIBLES

his otra eminence as a *sacer vates*. Remoteness is his due. *Procul, o procul este, profani!* If it be true, as La Guiccioli declares, that three weeks after marriage Lady Byron asked her husband "*when he intended giving up his versifying habits?*" the resultant tumult of his emotions is obvious. After that, chaos.

The gulf yawned between them; he saw it to be impassable. That there was no escape heightened his exasperation. The demon within him awoke, the more icily furious that he knew his wife to be a good, innocent, well-meaning woman, sincerely anxious for his welfare and desirous to mould him to the pattern of an exemplary man of quality, whose scribbling habits ought to be designed with the other indiscretions of youth. Lady Byron's goodness and innocence seemed in that moment of passion and wounded self-love an added cause of offence. Frozen inwardly, he turned on her a black and menacing scowl, and it gratified his devil to see her shrinking bewilderment. The blood surging to the brain was like a clutch of a hand upon the nerve centres : at the height of the paroxysm such thought as remained was murderous, yet not to actual violence. He knew the mood to be fictitious, but still he indulged it, for the perverse joy of a lofty, righteous and indignant protest against the Fates rather than the woman who had put this slight upon him. In such a mood he flourished pistols, if he did not actually fire them, in his wife's presence; not that he would harm her, but merely to sustain his heroics. Or, when asked the timid, irritating,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

too obvious question, " Do I disturb you, Byron? " the answer, after a pause involving for him an eternity of whirling resentment, snapped out in one word: " Damnably."

When the tension broke, he was as one beaten, shaken, regretful, if not penitent. This was the man who afterwards wept, not insincerely, at the sight of his fugitive wife's dress in her vacant room. It is as though he anticipated an emotion of Rossetti's :

What of her glass without her ? The blank grey
There where the pool is blind of the moon's face :
Her dress without her ? The tossed empty space
Of cloud-rack whence the moon has passed away.

A few seconds after his seizure, he was apparently normal, to his wife's further bewilderment. After such tokens of wickedness, she could not understand the sudden ensuing lightness of mood. To what strange spirit was she chained! His smile was now that of an angel; his words gentle—playful—endearing; she could almost believe he must love her, after all. And, in truth, captivating he could be. But, as time went on, her heart misgave her more sorely every day. She saw her endeavours baulked at every turn. And he was now so much occupied on that Drury Lane Committee, which brought him into contact with those dreadful women of the theatre. She would not willingly believe evil, but she had heard dubious whisperings; and he grew no more considerate. He kept frightful hours : he said in-

204

THE INCOMPATIBLES

credible things 1 He wrote poems breathing passion—for whom? As for tenderness, that seemed now to be bestowed on Augusta. True, she was his, and her, " dear Sis/⁵ but a wife is a wife.

There were constant and increasing worries over money matters. The bailiffs had been in 18 Piccadilly Terrace several times. The fairly ordered English home Lady Byron hoped to make had come to this squalid scramble ! Byron's irritation and touchiness grew worse and worse. She had no influence—except, it seemed, for evil. And the violent fits, or the passages of wild, sneering, silent rage, grew only more frequent. During these convulsions, it seemed as if reason tottered. She dared hardly entertain the thought, but—was Byron mad ?

The suggestion refused to be stilled. It grew insistent, it hardened to a chilling conviction. If it were true, her life—the child's life, was in danger. At length, she saw but one way—separation. But how propose it? It might mean a paroxysm of which she dared not contemplate the consequences. Often his very looks, whether of burning rage or cold contempt, had slain her! One day it might not end in looks. Escape she must, but with craft—announce a visit to her parents, take little Ada, depart with affectionate farewells, and a happy letter written on the journey—then home to Kirkby Mallory—confess all the misery and terror of those thirteen unhappy months to her father, and leave the rest to him.

So it was planned, and so it fell out. Dismal mis-

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

management on the part of advisers and the whisperings of scandal-mongers completed the *dibacle*, with its legacy of endless unedifying mystifications to those who sought for causes.

" The causes, my dear Sir," said Byron in exile to a friend, " the causes were too simple to be easily discovered."

XIII. THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

BYRON'S fame flowed and ebbed like the Solway. The first important onset which made him a society craze, to the deep satisfaction of fashionable book-sellers and himself, represents only partially the extent of the poet's earlier influence. Fashionable circles are proverbially fickle, and their bounds are narrow. The more steadfast devotees were to be found in the great middle-class throughout the United Kingdom. In Mayfair, Byron was only a passing fancy, but elsewhere his name became a household word. His beautiful face, his romantic and picturesque figure, familiarised in portraits, were enshrined in the hearts of sentimental young women, who sighed for his sorrows. His lines passed into current speech, and were adopted as the vehicle of private joys and griefs. Never had the public enjoyed such a debauch of vicarious emotions. In part, however, the picturesque image of the poet was the creation of pictorial art. Had admiring girls in the provinces seen their idol in the flesh, they would have suffered some disillusion, as far as costume was concerned. Had they met him in Bond Street, they would have missed much they had come to regard as essential. He was somewhat dandified, but even the figure of a D'Orsay is, at the best, a little commonplace. Conformity to the

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

prevailing mode, however exquisite, may be admirable, but is scarcely thrilling. Mr. John Murray the Third, speaking on the authority of his father, assured Mr. Minchin, author of "Old Harrow Days," that "Byron did not actually walk about London in the loose open collars. That was a fancy costume."

But the popular image of romance took hold and has remained. It harmonized with and reinforced the idea of the poet conveyed by his poetry, which went home with a force and directness impossible for even the most appreciative of present-day readers to realise. That receptivity can never be recaptured, for Byron's age was prepared by circumstances to receive him. He gave it just exactly the poetry that fitted its temper and understanding. It was an age accustomed to revolt and not too nice in its sense of literary workmanship. At that time, the slogging diffuseness of even the best critical writing (to say nothing of the newspapers) found its counterpart in Byron's verse. He spoke in a language to be understood of the people. And he tickled them with his fine careless outlawry, his touches of Oriental glamour, his fire and passion. All the world loves a lover, and when that lover is broken-hearted and makes no secret of his wound, popular success is a foregone conclusion. There was something crude and childish in the public that responded to these qualities. That is why he is so much the poet of youth; and to-day, if the old enthusiasm be at all recoverable, the secret is open only to the young. One of the most gifted and fastidious of

208

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

our younger poets said recently to the present writer : " Byron was my earliest influence, and I love him still, though I think I have outlived his empire."⁵

In the first flush of his power, Byron appealed not only to girls but to boys. Even after the world had turned against the man, his poetry kept its hold, and his passing left a sense of desolation in young hearts. The fourteen-year-old Tennyson, on hearing the news of the poet's death, carved upon the sandstone rocks at Holywell the words : " Byron is dead." " It was a day," he said later, " on which the whole world seemed to be darkened for me."¹ His votive inscription recalls that scratched by some sentimental Scottish archer on the wall of a chapel beside the Loire—" Bayard is deid."²

It is to Tennyson that we owe a glimpse of Byron's power over quiet domestic circles in the early nineteenth century. The Laureate's grandmother, a poetically minded lady, who asserted that " Alfred's poetry all came from her," used to read to him " when a boy, ' The Prisoner of Chillon ' very tenderly." But this acceptance was not universal. His great-uncle, the Rev. Samuel Turner, " on the contrary smashed the bottom out of his glass of rum and water on the dinner table, as he inveighed against ' this new-fangled Byron.' "³

Tennyson's desolation is not to be accounted for merely

1 Hallam Tennyson: " Tennyson, a Memoir."

2 Inscription quoted by Andrew Lang: *Cornhill Magazine*, December 1903.

3 Hallam Tennyson: *op. cit.*

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

as the feeling of an ardent and romantic boy who has lost his hero. Scott, writing to Lady Abercorn, said that he was "terribly distressed"; and Carlyle, writing to Jane Welsh, said, "The news of his death came down upon my heart like a mass of lead, and yet, the thought of it sends a painful twinge through all my being as if I had lost a brother."⁵ Miss Welsh, in a letter which crossed Carlyle's to her, confesses to similar emotions: "My God, if they had said that the Sun or the Moon had gone out of the Heavens, it could not have struck me with the idea of a more awful and dreary blank in the creation than the words, 'Byron is dead/ I have felt quite cold and dejected ever since: all my thoughts have been fearful and dismal." Carlyle and his bride-to-be, although not children, were still in the first enthusiasm of life, and so their rather extravagant grief is emotionally more on a parallel with the young Tennyson's. Sir Walter's poignant distress is that of a man of mature years—a man, too, who looked on life and its vicissitudes with a calm and temperate judgment; but he had conceived for Byron an affection which resembled that of David for Absalom. Carlyle was, later, to modify his view, if not on personal at least on poetic and ethical grounds. Three years after Byron's death he could still write of him as "the only parallel to Burns," but the day was to come when he would inveigh against the "sham strong man" and find him wanting, in a "message" to the age: "Close your Byron—open your Goethe."

On the young intellectuals of the day, when they had

210

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

outgrown boyhood, and had reached the more critical, if still immature, literary appreciation of the undergraduate, Byron's influence declined early. In 1828, Tennyson went up to Cambridge and entered that genial, high-spirited poetical set described in "In Memoriam." They were, his son tells us, full of speculation and of enthusiasm for the great literature of the past and for the modern schools, and despised rhetoric and sentimentalism. "The modern poets in the ascendant among them were Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats; but Byron's 'comet blaze' was evidently on the wane." Tennyson, however, was to return, so far, to his allegiance. The ripened judgment of his later years gave Byron a place, if not among the "great sage poets of all," at least of honour.

During the next ten years Byron's reputation passed through that period of eclipse which comes to every considerable writer immediately after his death. Adverse judgment was accentuated as much by moral as by literary considerations. To the more rigidly righteous his name and works alike were objects of execration. His poetry was regarded as deadly poison, which conscientious pastors and masters strove diligently to keep out of young people's hands. Notable objection came from the pen of an American writer, Dr. John Todd, author of "The Student's Manual"—a widely popular volume, which aimed at teaching young men how to combine virtue with worldly prosperity. His philippic has historical value as the quintessence of extreme ad-

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

verse opinion. It is to be feared, however, that Dr. Todd's counsel, with its minute exposition of the poet's iniquity, proved more attractive than deterrent to young curiosity. For audience Dr. Todd no doubt had in his eye Macaulay's hopeful undergraduates and medical students, who under the spell of Byron " became things of dark imaginings, on whom the freshness of the heart ceased to fall like dew, whose passions had consumed themselves to dust, and to whom the relief of tears was denied. This was not the worst: there was created in the minds of many of these enthusiasts a pernicious and absurd association between intellectual power and moral depravity. From the poetry of Lord Byron they drew a system of ethics compounded of misanthropy and voluptuousness, a system in which the two great commandments were to hate your neighbour and to love your neighbour's wife." That affectation, Macaulay notes, had passed away at the time he wrote (1831)—it may be doubted if it ever existed to such a virulent degree. Not long ago we were told, on the authority of a leading critical journal, that Macaulay's writ no longer runs—since Sir Walter Raleigh put him out of court. Byron himself said, with reference to the alleged pernicious influence of his writings, that reading " Don Juan " led to no seductions, just as Johnson held that Macheath made nobody a rogue. Macaulay thought the danger had passed. To Dr. Todd it still appeared a melancholy fact. " What shall be said," he asks, " of such works as those of Byron? May not a young man read those?

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

Can he not learn things from him which cannot be learned elsewhere? I reply, Yes, just as you would learn while treading on burning lava what could not be learned elsewhere. . . . Is he a benefactor to his species who here and there throws out a beautiful thought or a poetic image, but, as you stoop to pick it up, chains upon you a putrid carcase which you can never throw off? I believe a single page may be selected from Byron which has done more hurt to the mind and the heart of the young than all his writings have ever done good." With some inhumanity Dr. Todd does not give the precise reference, but perhaps he means any single page, chosen at random.

The good Doctor, however, finds consolation, and adds that Byron " will quickly pass from notice and is doomed to be exiled from the libraries of all virtuous men." In this centenary year, if library shelves be any guide, virtuous men must be rare indeed.

Thereupon Dr. Todd goes on to show that he has not condemned the accused unheard, nor does the accused stand alone in the dock : " But, say you, has my author ever read Byron and Moore, Hume and Paine, Scott, Bulwer and Cooper? Yes, he has read them all and with too much care. He knows every rock and every quicksand; and he solemnly declares to you that the only good he is conscious of having received from them is, a deep impression that men who possess talents of such compass and power, and so perverted in their application, must meet the day of judgment under a responsibility

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

which would be cheaply removed by the price of a world." Nor do Byron's imitators fare any better, although here Dr. Todd's criticism is justified, on the score, at least, of literary permanence : " Of the many who have tried to follow in the wake of Byron, is there one who will live in song? Not one. They could copy nothing but his measure and his wickedness, borrowing his vileness without his genius. The lion himself is fast turning to corruption, but no honey will be found in the carcase; and as for his followers, the world was relieved from their curse by their decaying before they could taint the moral atmosphere."

Although literary interest in Byron declined steadily after his death, the personal was kept alive by controversy. Fugitive publications afford some index to the ebb and flow of the dispute. The periodicals of the late 'Thirties and 'Forties are almost barren of articles on Byron; the silence is complete in the years 1832, -87, -88, -41, -43, -44, -46 and -49; but in the 'Fifties and 'Sixties the question revives, and, after Mrs. Beecher Stowe's communication in 1869, the flood runs higher than every the only complete blank being the year 1879. But down to the close of the eighth decade of last century, the books, the magazines, review articles and pamphlets are concerned far more with the moral than with the literary question. On the Continent, on the other hand, where Byron's influence has been supreme and steady, critics occupied themselves with Byron's poetry. **In 1886** Diintzer discussed " Manfred and Lessing's Dr. 214

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

Faustus." In 1851, Johannes Scherr's critique appeared in his "General History of Literature," Taine's in 1863, Mazzini's in 1870, and Dr. Georg Brandes⁵ in 1872. At home, David Macbeth Moir, in 1851, included an essay on Byron in his "Sketches of the Poetical Literature of the Past Half-Century"; in 1854 Hazlitt wrote on Byron in his "Johnson's Lives of the Poets Completed"; but until the later 'Seventies purely literary criticism of the poet was to all intents and purposes dormant in Great Britain. Byron seemed beneath the notice of an age that had heard new voices and had dreamed new dreams. Tennyson and Swinburne, Morris and Rossetti had awakened the lovers of poetry to new concepts. Swinburne might be as great a rebel, even to scandal, as Byron, but he served an ideal of literary beauty Byron knew not. Tennyson, fastidious in workmanship, melodious and memorable in line, although perhaps a trifle heterodox in fine points of theology, taught beauty of a kind that could be safely received into every Victorian home; while Morris and Rossetti, the one a Socialist, but respectable, the other somewhat of the Bohemian, asserted the claims of Art. The Medoras, Gulnares and Zuleikas had become either stately English *grandes dames* or picturesque heroines of the Arthurian romance with Tennyson; Swinburne had replaced them with an Atalanta or () a Faustine; while Rossetti had transmuted them to the faint and fading figure of a Blessed Beatrice or to the more modern and realistic Jenny.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

The age had learned to tread in softer ways : it went Maying with Queen Guinevere or dreamed in dim halls where the light fell many-hued through painted windows—a legacy, this, of Keats; Matthew Arnold had restored the chiselled chastity of classical form, yet without over-much pedantry. Browning, too, had revived the spirit of Renaissance art. The literary world had become "intense." Byron seemed an unblushing son of thunder; he spoke only of temporalities in crude and slipshod verse : he stood outside the City of the Soul.

But in the very ranks of the most fastidious, Byron was about to find a champion, none other than the critic who was accepted, *par excellence*, as the Apostle of Culture, in the late nineteenth century acceptance of that term. It seemed an extraordinary, even an unaccountable, departure. Every new movement, however, has its precursors, and for some little time previously there had been signs of a return to the serious criticism of Byron as a poet. In 1876, Professor Minto's article on Byron appeared in "Encyclopaedia Britannica," and two years later William Michael Rossetti published his essay on "The Lives of Famous Poets..'. Professor Nichols' "Byron" was added to the "English Men of Letters" series in 1880, and the same year saw Kingsley's "Thoughts on Shelley and Byron." To 1880 belongs also J. A. Symonds' "Lord Byron" in "Ward's English Poets."

This revival of interest among literary men of the inner court culminated in 1881, when Matthew Arnold's

216

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

" Preface " to the " Selections from Byron " startled and even scandalised the elect*. It seemed to many a strange heresy that a poet and critic so austere as Arnold should take concern with a poet apparently so alien to himself in poetical sympathy and poetical workmanship. At the time, Byron's literary reputation stood so low with those who believed that they understood what poetry is and should be, that it seemed almost unworthy of Mr. Arnold's regard. Had he written of Byron merely to confirm the poet's discredit, the task, although perhaps superfluous, would have seemed at least an interesting exercise; but the circumstances precluded a judgment of that sort. Mr. Arnold's purpose was to make a selection of the best in Byron, and in writing a preface to the volume he could not very well play Devil's Advocate. It is not suggested that this consideration consciously coloured his criticism, for he had long desired to disengage the best examples from the whole body of Byron's poetry, and his favourable estimate and defence arose therefore from sincere conviction. He felt that this service was due to Byron's memory.

The service, admirable in intention, had little conciliatory effect. It may be that the strictly occasional character of the essay laid the writer under some disabilities of the special pleader. Mr. Arnold passed beyond the limits of detached criticism and ventured to play the prophet. Had he been content with pointing out the " really excellent " in Byron's work, supporting his selections in salient instances with the then acknow-

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

ledged weight of his critical opinion, and leaving his audience to consider the case at leisure, he would have done more for his client. As it was, he stirred up fresh trouble, which reacted unfavourably on the poet he sought to bring into better esteem. The usually calm persuasion of Arnold's criticism was in this instance prejudiced by a concession to enthusiasm—not in itself extravagant, but, coming from that quarter, perilously like fierce partisanship. Added to that, Arnold gave hostages to fortune in attempting a final estimate of Byron's place in literature. Sure in his belief, he ventured to predict that another twenty years would see Byron and Wordsworth recognised as the chief poets of the nineteenth century. "When the year 1900 is turned and our nation comes to recount her poetic glories in the century which has just ended, the first names with her will be these."

Arnold's advocacy provoked not only surprise but indignation. The boldest reply came from Swinburne, who had not hitherto appeared wholly adverse to Byron. Arnold, in fact, had quoted Swinburne in his own report. "Noble praise," he called it, "the praise for the splendid and imperishable excellence which covers all his offences, and outweighs all his defects, the excellence of sincerity and strength." By the time Arnold's defence appeared, Mr. Swinburne was not prepared to stand by his own words; in his foaming attack he acknowledged handsomely enough the honour which Mr. Arnold had paid him, and although he did not definitely go back on

218

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

his opinions, in so many words, the whole tenour of his reply made it one of the most virulent, probably the most virulent, indictment ever made against Byron's poetry. He poured contempt not only upon Arnold's subject, but upon his plea, and, carried away by the exuberance of his own verbosity, he did less than justice to his own undoubted critical powers. He speaks of Byron's "blundering, floundering, lumbering and stumbling stanza, his gasping, ranting, wheezing, broken-winded verse," and asks, "Was ever such jolter-headed jargon heard before from Bedlam or Parnassus?" "This idol of our grandfathers or of our grandmothers," he says, "could attain no higher title to fame than one which is the appanage of every successful press-man or improvisatore, the title of a very clever man. One thing is very certain: no man with a touch of true spiritual instinct could have perpetrated such monstrous stupidities."¹ Thereupon Swinburne makes an admission not out of harmony with his former praise, which, however, he hastens to qualify immediately. He allows that the perpetrator had fancy, wit, fire, natural and artificial, with very remarkable versatility, but in all the composition of his highly composite nature, there was neither a note of real music nor a gleam of real imagination.

Many causes went to arouse Swinburne's indignation. Professor Grierson² has pointed out the differences between Byron and Swinburne, whose "poems are not as

1 Swinburne: *Miscellanies*—"Byron and Wordsworth."

2 Warton Lecture, 1920: "Lord Byron, Arnold and Swinburne."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

Byron's or Burns's, the vibrating response to the agitations of experience and passion. • • • Swinburne's are the record of emotions begotten in the library, begotten of over-much reading of Elizabethan plays and Greek tragedy and lyric, and Old French and Italian song; or if his inspiration is more modern, he sings of liberty and babies and the sea, as Victor Hugo had done before him."

But how, it may be asked, should this sympathy with classical literature throw Swinburne out of accord with Byron, who himself was so knowledgeable a poet and is so rich in literary allusion? One reason is that Byron's classicism was not the same as Swinburne's. With all his wide acquaintance with the classics, Byron was not a scholar after the finished manner in which Swinburne was a scholar. And there was another factor making for antagonism. Swinburne's thought and poetic manner were coloured and moulded by the poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites, "that cunningly wrought poetry of artistic reconstruction, the reconstruction of old moods and old modes, Greek or Mediaeval, especially the latter," Over all this movement there lay, as it were, a film of decadence, accompanied by the inevitable sensitiveness "of decadence to a soft sensuousness of expression, a jealous care for choice of word and phrase. These poets worked in ivory and gold: the achievement of *curiosa felicitas* had become for them a sacred cult. This was the negation of Byron, rough and ready—almost as the reporter is rough and ready in seizing the first word that serves his turn. It is in the antagonism of these two moods that the

220

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

origin of Swinburne's wrath is to be discovered. He found sympathisers in critics such as Mr. Saintsbury and Andrew Lang. Mr. Saintsbury was more temperate and judicial in his language, but for that very reason more coldly damnatory. "Hardly a passage," he says, "certainly no long poem, of his can be cited, which, after brilliant images, forcible expressions, and melodious verse, does not break down into the most commonplace talk and phrase, the most inharmonious rhythm, even into sheer bellman's rhyme and kitchen-maid's grammar." That was in 1888. In 1891, Mr. Saintsbury¹ wrote of Byron's bastard romanticism, and in 1896 he said that "all attempts to rehabilitate Byron have certainly never yet succeeded, even with the majority of competent critics or with the majority of readers of poetry." Then, taking a leaf out of Swinburne's book, he committed himself to the remark that counter-jumpers, like Thackeray's own Pogson, worshipped the noble poet; boys of nobler stamp like Tennyson *thought* they worshipped him, but if they were going to become men of affairs forgot all about him; if they were to be poets took to Keats and Shelley as models, not to him. Critics hardly took him seriously, except for non-literary reasons.

Tennyson, it is true, said in later life that as a boy he had a surfeit of Byron, and could not now read him as he should like to do, but he felt none the less that he

¹ G. Saintsbury: "Byron." *Chambers's Encyclopaedia*. See also "Nineteenth Century Literature."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

was unduly depreciated. He made a distinction which is significant, taken in connection with the glorification of Keats and Shelley at the expense of Byron. He found that even the two former poets, the gods of the pre-Raphaelites, and especially of Mr, Swinburne, had limitations as well as Byron. He even includes them with Byron in his criticism. "One must distinguish," said Tennyson, "Keats, Shelley and Byron from the great sage poets of all, who are both great thinkers and great artists, like Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Dante, and Goethe." The distinction is characteristic of the larger mind of Tennyson, whose power over classical material and classical form is untouched by decadence, just as his mediaeval romance is a different thing from that of Morris, Rossetti and Swinburne.

While the counterblast to Arnold's plea for Byron found some acceptance with Andrew Lang, in whom there is a faint touch of decadence (but a decadence never unhealthy, for it does not go beyond a delicate feeling for the charm and fragrance of dead rose leaves) that critic was at the best but somewhat half-hearted in his subscription to the Swinburnian creed. Lang the* Sc6t, the worshipper of Walter Scott who saw and brought out the best in Byron, had in him something of fresh air and fire not alien to the Byronic, had he chosen to put less restraint upon himself and his methods. He held to his qualified preciousness, but that did not prevent him from writing what is at once an assertion of his own literary creed and a recantation of harsher stricture

222

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

on Byron. In his "Letters to Dead Authors," although he could say to Byron,

I hate the slang, I hate the personalities,
I loathe the aimless, reckless, loose dispersion
Of every rhyme that in the singer's wallet is,
I hate it, as you hated the *Excursion*,

he could yet go on to poke fun both at Arnold and Swinburne, and in the last stanza he inclines more than a little towards the Arnoldian position :

Farewell, thou Titan fairer than the Gods !
Farewell, farewell, thou swift and lovely spirit,
Thou splendid warrior with the world at odds,
Unpraised, unpraisable beyond thy merit;
Chased, like Orestes, by the Furies' rods,
Like him at length thy peace dost thou inherit,
Beholding whom men think how fairer far
Than all the steadfast stars the wandering star.

In the critical world Arnold's plea did more harm than good. The weighty names of his antagonists influenced the younger school against Byron and discounted the effect of Arnold's selection. It seemed as though a great critic had been sadly left to himself. Arnold came to his task under several handicaps. He represented a more purely academic trend of thought than those who opposed him. Upon him lay the taint of the schoolmaster. He was not of the world that plumed itself on being " artistic "—further, he had com-

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

mitted himself to the rashness of a definite prophecy. He had dared to anticipate the opinion of the year 1900, and, when the year 1900 came round, it found his antagonists still impenitent, and able to point to the futility of his forecast. By that time the younger generation of poets and critics seemed to have moved farther than ever away from Byron. They had turned even from Tennyson, whom they called the reporters' poet. Nearly all the old gods were at a discount; but, if Arnold was rash in fixing a date, he was not therefore entirely out in his opinion, for the new century, given a few more years for consideration, was to show signs of a conversion towards Arnold's position. Even in 1900 there was some premonition of this movement. In that year *The Edinburgh Review*, Byron's first and bitterest literary enemy, in its article on Mr. Murray's edition of the poet's Complete Works, took into account the tendency of latter-day verse towards that over-delicacy of fibre which has been termed decadent, and held that for ephemeral infirmities of this kind, the straightforward virility of Byron's best work may serve as an antidote."¹ gFour years later, Professor Wight Duff, a warm but very judicious admirer of Byron's, insisted upon the value of the poet's personal note, which speaks to different periods. "The personal note,"² whether the lyric cry or not, engrosses attention as widely as the individual writer can make himself interesting. The effective charm

1 *Edinburgh Review*, October, 1900.

2 J. Wight Duff: "Byron, Selected Poetry." 1904.

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

depends on the individuality behind the work : a wild volcanic temperament, like the Byronic, uttering its inner soul in art, powerfully, fearlessly, and beautifully, must awake responses in ages quite other than its own, for human nature repeats itself, and there are always those who feel with Terence

" Homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto."

If not 1900, 1920 was to bring a memorable vindication of Byron, all the more persuasive that the critic who made it was, apart from his intrinsic qualifications, a man deeply in sympathy with the beauties of the Pre-Raphaelite school. Professor Grierson, while bating no jot of his allegiance to " the masters of cunning technique " who were " startled and indignant when commanded to do reverence to the crudities of Byron's earliest verses, the flamboyant improvisations of his verse tales, and even of the greater ' Childe Harold/ supported by short selections from the rich and abounding life of that shocking and delightful poem, ' Don Juan,' that great epic of modern Europe," could still say that " the beauties of the other school sometimes pall, and it is with a powerful re-quickening of our blood that we hear again the rolling guns and clattering squadrons of the stanzas on Waterloo, the storm and passion of the night by Lake Lemán. The old thrill comes back when we read again of ' the Niobe of Nations,'

Childless and crownless in her voiceless woe,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

het tombs and ruined Forum, the empty moonlit Coliseum; or hear the old moral, in accents, of reverberating intensity, of the vanity of human life, the intoxicating sweetness of love, the sublimity and indifference of nature."¹

Professor Grierson notes that " the trend of poetry since Mr. Arnold's prophetic date has passed has been in the direction of a simpler art, a closer touch with actuality; and it is this which has tempted me to ask myself whether, now that Byronism is certainly a thing of the past, Byron may not yet be alive, and if so what are the elements in his work which have proved most enduring."

This opinion, coming from such a quarter, may be read as something of a prophecy, a prophecy less likely to provoke prejudicial challenge than that of Mr. Arnold. Its hope of a future for Byron lies chiefly in the present-day return to actuality. Masfield has revived the tale in verse, and has ventured a realism in his transcription of coarse and profane men's speech, to which the naughtinesses of " Don Juan " are but as shadows; and so far from provoking scandal, Mr. Masfield has won the acceptance and admiration, not only of the public, but of those who profess to know what poetry is and should be. He is no imitator of Byron, but he may have been influenced indirectly through the vogue of Russian realism, and Byron's overwhelming influence on Europe is nowhere stronger than on Russian literature. Before the

1 Grierson: *op. cit.*

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF FAME

present century is much older, Byron's directness and, above all, his enthusiasm for liberty may make a new appeal to an age that has seen the end of many tyrannies and professes itself pledged to the cause of the fullest freedom for mankind of all classes. And there may be another indication. Quite recently there has been a marked return to interest in eighteenth century literature. It was as an enthusiast for that period that Byron began, and although, in his later development, he made a distinct *demarche* towards something more Wordsworthian, the influence of the eighteenth century remained with him to the end, and he cannot be understood fully if that period be left wholly out of account. The present age may be moving towards him along more than one line of thought. But above all Byron must be judged by what he is in himself, not by what other schools of poetry think he ought to have been. So regarded, he makes his true appeal of personality, fire, force, and vivid imagery, and comes into his own.¹

X An interesting concrete illustration of the fluctuations of Byron's fame will be found in the history of the Byron Statues. See Appendix A.

XIV. THE SCOT IN BYRON

THE supposition that Byron spent a miserable childhood in Scotland is difficult to reconcile with that loyalty to the north which marked his later years. The memory of Deeside was never absent from his thoughts, and it crept into his verse even at the most unlikely moments, as in that surprising fetch of poetical collocation :

And Loch-na-gar with Ida looked o'er Troy.

And not the hills only, but the sea of the north-eastern coast of Scotland remained a permanent inspiration, for it was there that he learned to swim. On this account, just as he connected Loch-na-gar with Ida, so Professor Wight Duff, in a perfectly reasonable hypothesis, remarks that it was off Aberdeen beach that Byron learned[^]to swim the Hellespont. Nor is it any great strain of probability to detect in the line

Place me among the rocks I love

an underlying reference to the craggy coast that gives place to the smooth sands of Aberdeen Bay at the mouth of the Dee. There is a similar and even clearer reminiscence in " Don Juan," although the scene is altered to an Ionian island. The Don and Dee he commemorates with their contrast of the silvery and the sullen—the

228

THE SCOT IN BYRON

silver of Dee in verse, and the darkness of Don in a note : ". The Bridge of Don near the Auld Toun of Aberdeen, with its one arch and its black deep salmon stream below, is in my memory as yesterday.⁵' He recalls, in the notes to " The Island," that it was from the period of his summer holidays at Ballater that he dated his love of mountainous countries. Only a Scot in exile can realise in full the meaning of the remainder of the passage : " I can never forget the effect, a few years afterwards, in England, of the only thing I had long seen even in miniature of a mountain, in the Malvern Hills. After I returned to Cheltenham I used to watch them every afternoon at sunset, with a sensation which I cannot describe. This was boyish enough but I was then only thirteen years old and it was the holidays." These reveries, throwing back to the north, " to sit on rocks : to muse o'er flood and fell," became characteristic. " One of his chief delights, as he mentioned in his Memoranda, was to seat himself on a high rock above the sea, and there remain for hours, gazing upon the sky and the waters, and lost in that sort of vague reverie, which, however formless and indistinct at the moment, settled afterwards on his pages, into those clear bright pictures which will endure for ever."¹ The northern reference was inevitable: the wild hills of Albania carried him back to Morven—a mountain still so closely linked with the poet's memory that, during a war-time summer, an old longshoreman of the Kincardineshire

BYBON IN PERSPECTIVE

coast, pointing out the crest to a southron stranger, added reverently : "Aye, Byron has a piece on Morven." He never lost a chance of reviving these associations. Referring in the preface to " Cain " to Gessner's " Death of Abel," he said : " I have never read it since I was eight years of age at Aberdeen "; and in his note on his reading of the Scriptures he says : " I speak as a boy, from the recollected impression of that period at Aberdeen." To Sir Walter Scott he said " I was brought up a canny Scot "; and, as nearly every remark of his was at some time or other pressed into the service of his verse, this claim to nationality is echoed in the lines " I am half a Scot and bred a whole one . . . I ' *scotched*, not killed,' the Scotchman in my blood "; and, rather surprising and not very accurate assertion, " I was bred a moderate Presbyterian." Here he refers, no doubt, to his clerical tutors, Mr. Ross and Mr. Paterson, and to visits to the Kirk with one or other of his nurses. It is known that May Gray's place of worship was the Cathedral of St. Machar in Old Aberdeen, a Presbyterian sanctuary long separated from prelatical observances. There is no actual evidence that Byron was taken to the Cathedral, but it is possible. With his mother he attended St. Paul's Episcopal Church in the New Town. A lady who occupied the same pew used to recall how she had seen young George sticking pins into his mamma's arms during the service.¹ If it

1 Rev, James Smith: " Records of an Aberdeen Family "; and Bulloch: " House of Gordon."

THE SCOT IN BYRON

be true that he was " cudgelled to church,' he found At least some compensation.

The minor inconveniences of Scottish life left no rancour. From Pisa he wrote in 1822 : " My heart warms to the tartan or to anything of Scotland which reminds me of Aberdeen and other parts, not so far from the Highlands as that town, about Invercauld and Braemar, where I was sent to drink *goats' fey* in 1795-6 in consequence of a threatened decline after scarlet fever." To Pry se Lockhart Gordon in Brussels he used the word " brochan " (oatmeal gruel) and added: " You see I have not forgot all my Scotch." That he remembered it really well is proved by the use of " fey " just quoted, which showed that he was alive to the northern use of " f " for " wh." Even on such minute points his memory was faithful.

His *heimwek* for Scotland cannot be all sentimental pose. It occurs too often and too fervently, both in his poems and in his letters, to be insincere :

Adieu, ye mountains of the clime

Where grew my youthful years;

Where Loch na Garr in snows sublime

His giant summit rears.

Why did my childhood wander forth

From you, ye regions of the North

With sons of pride to roam?

Why did I quit my Highland cave,

Marr's dusky heath, and Dee's clear wave

To seek a Sotheron home!

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

" Highland cave " may be a little too reminiscent of the eighteenth century (like Mr. Pope's " pensive grot "), and hypercritics might detect a touch of Cockneyism in Byron's claim to be a " Young Highlander "—whose cap was the bonnet, whose cloak was the plaid—but it may pass as poetical licence. He was perfectly aware of the difference between Saxon and Celt, as when he says : " Waverley . . . is all easy to me because I have been in Scotland so much (though then young enough too), and feel at home with the people, Lowland and Gael." His leal heart towards Scotland was recognised among Scots during the high tide of his vogue in London; and in May 1814 he wrote the "Address, intended to be recited at the Caledonian Meeting." Its plea for the ex-Service man and his family has a curiously modern flavour.

It is reasonable to ask whether these yearnings for the north ended with lip-service. The answer to the question is somewhat complicated and obscure. We have Byron's explicit testimony that after 1798 he never returned to Aberdeen; but there is a legend—and something more than a legend—that he revisited, if not the city of Aberdeen, at least Upper Deeside. The tradition explains and harmonises well with an otherwise rather obscure and puzzling passage in a letter which the poet wrote in August 1805 to Charles O. Gordon, of Abergeldie, his schoolfellow at Harrow. There he refers to his having passed near Abergeldie " some years ago on an excursion through the Highlands." Almost envi-

232

THE SCOT IN BYRON

ously, he remarks that Gordon " will soon have a view of the eternal snows that summit the top of Lachin-y-gair, which towers so magnificently above the rest of our Northern Alps." He indulges in a little rhapsody on the romantic beauties of the scenery, recalling the local detail with a freshness and accuracy that seems to imply a visit more recent than seven or eight years previously. But of any later visit nothing was known until the late 'Seventies of last century, when an old ghillie told the Rev. J. G. Michie¹ that Lord Byron had actually returned and had climbed Lochnagar under the informant's guidance. He said that he took Lord Byron to be then about sixteen or seventeen years old, but Michie suggests 1803 as a likelier date. During that year Byron is known to have absented himself from Harrow at the end of the summer holidays, and his movements during the period are not very clear. He was then in the most acute phase of his passion for Mary Chaworth, and was giving his mother a great deal of trouble by his refusal to go back to school, to which he did not return until January 1804. It has been suggested, therefore, that he may have gone off on his own account to Scotland. That would not have been surprising, for both then and later he continually talked about taking a tour in the north, and the project, which never seemed to be carried out, became a standing joke among his friends.² He was quite capable of gratifying his whim without refer-

1 Michie: " Records of Invercauld."

2 Prothero: *op. cit.*

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

ence to authority, and he was always moderately well supplied with money. Many of the circumstances related by the guide bear all the stamp of truth. He spoke of the lame boy's frequent halts for rest, his brooding reserve and his long, silent gazing at the mountains he loved. It might be objected that the account is coloured by Mr Michie's knowledge of Byron's habits, but the Minister of Dinnet—a most meticulously accurate historian and antiquary—may be trusted to have set down the story exactly as he received it. His informant gave him to understand, further, that Byron was at the time a guest at Invercauld; and although the family records are silent on the point, Mr. Michie suggests a perfectly plausible explanation. Certainty is impossible, but there is a strong probability that Byron did revisit the north. Whether the year was 1803 or not, is another matter.

Speculation on this point turns on another tradition still current in Aberdeen. There is an extraordinary story—absurd, on the face of it, if Byron never saw Scotland again after he was ten years old; but not so wildly absurd, with certain reservations, if it is told of a lad in his teens. The story goes that Byron dived off the Brig of Balgownie, swam down to Donmouth, crossed Aberdeen Bay to the North Pier, and back—a stretch of about six miles. No small feat, even for a grown man. His denial that he ever revisited Aberdeen is not wholly inconsistent with the acceptance of this story in its modified form. Without actually entering the city, he

THE SCOT IN BYRON

could have gone to see his old nurse, Agnes Gray, who was then married and living at Woodside, a village on the northern outskirts of the town, not very far from the Bridge of Don. A fairly well supported tradition says that when he was a very little boy he went off on his own account to stay with Agnes, who had married during her term of service with his mother. Did he repeat the *sub rosa* visit on a later occasion?

Another story that floats about Woodside would, if true, substantiate the theory that he did so return. In that case, nothing is more probable than that he went for a swim in the Don. Of the stretch from the bridge to the mouth of the river, so fine a swimmer would make nothing, and he may even have taken so extended a turn in the bay that onlookers were impressed and the feat became legendary. The exaggeration of details was only a matter of time and frequent repetition. The dive from the bridge is hardly credible. It would be formidable even for a gay and reckless Gordon.

Examination of the chronology of Byron's letters suggests a yet later date for a possible visit to Scotland. Between August 11 and October 19, 1811, a complete break occurs, and the poet's whereabouts during the interval are not known. On the former date he wrote to Miss Pigot: " On Sunday next I set off for the Highlands." His ambitious itinerary included Edinburgh, Inveraray, the Hebrides and (time and weather permitting) Iceland—to " peep at Hecla." This last intention he begs Miss Pigot to keep a secret, lest his

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

nice mamma should raise the accustomed war-whoop. He continues : " Last week I swam in the Thames from Lambeth through the two bridges, Westminster and Blackfriars, a distance including the different turns and tacks made on the way, of three miles." This in itself proves nothing; but the long disappearance, and the manner of the poet's reappearance, afford grounds for interesting conjecture. On the latter date Byron reported himself from Dorant's hotel in London to Hanson, his solicitor, from whom he begged immediate supplies, for he was in dire straits. He was at that moment " contemplating with woeful visage one solitary Guinea, two bad sixpences and a shilling, being all the cash at present in possession of yours very truly, BYRON.'" It looks as if Lord Byron of Trinity had just come off a long journey. It is true that he knew many other ways of getting into low water than a sentimental journey to Scotland, but the obscurity of his whereabouts is more complete than it was in 1808, and it is not altogether beyond the bounds of credibility that this may have been the occasion when he looked once more on

Thy steep summit, Oh Morven of Snow.

The desire to revisit Scotland died hard. After his marriage, he wrote to Moore on July 7 : " Perhaps you and Mrs Moore will pay us a visit at Seaham in the course of the Autumn. If so, you and I (without our wives) will take a lark to Edinburgh and embrace Jeffrey. It is not much above one hundred miles from

THE SCOT IN BYRON

us." And when he was going north to be married he had a scheme for a dash over the Border. After his exile, when he thought of returning to Great Britain, a visit to Abbotsford appeared among his projects; and among all the tokens of his Scottish sympathies, none was more striking than his affectionate regard for Sir Walter Scott. Long before he met the great magician, he had come under his spell, notwithstanding the hard things he had said about Scott's poetry in "English Bards." In Albania, as we have seen, the court of Ali Pacha reminded him of Branksome; and much of the glamour of the Turkish vizier's entourage was derived not only from his own predilections and lively imagination, but from Scott's "Nine and twenty Knights of Fame."

The magnanimous Scott, who bore no rancour for his treatment in "English Bards," but took it, after the first moment of irritation, with his usual good humour and fine sense of proportion, told Mr. Murray in Edinburgh that he would be glad to meet Lord Byron. Accordingly, when Scott came to London, Murray took an early opportunity of bringing the two poets together. The meeting had memorable results. Scott had the power of seeing and bringing out all that was best in Byron, who never appears to greater advantage than when he is writing to or of Scott. In "The Giaour," "The Bride of Abydos," "The Corsair," "The Siege of Corinth," and rather less in "Lara," the style and measure of the poems proclaim Scott's influence. In

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

his letters Byron links their names : " Scott and me **; and in his diagram of Parnassus, his triangular Gradus, he places Scott at the top, as the " undoubted Monarch."

In his requests to Murray for books, it is always Scott, Scott, and again Scott that he desires : " All prose, bating travels and novels NOT by Scott, is welcome, especially Scott's ' Tales of my Landlord ' and so on." Byron tells his publisher that he is " in a very fierce humour " at not having Scott's " Monastery " : " The Abbot " reminds him of his Gordon ancestors—whom, curiously enough, he never mentions by name in his poems, although he alludes to them in " Lochnagar " and names them in the footnote to the line :

Ill-starred though brave, did no visions foreboding
Tell you that fate had forsaken your cause?

The enthusiasm for Scott was whole-hearted, and never once in any reference to his friend did Byron yield to his habitual *aribre pensee* and take back what he has just said with some capricious qualification. " Oh," he exclaimed to Pryse Lockhart Gordon, when talking to him of Scott, " I wish it had been my good fortune to have had such a Mentor I " Mr. John Murray I I I . believed—and in his opinion he is not singular—that Scott was the one man who might have saved Byron; he regretted that the younger poet had not known Scott more intimately.¹

At the first glance Sir Walter seemed to understand

1 Minchin: *op. cit.*

THE SCOT IN BYRON

and appreciate Byron. He saw the strange mixture of genius and waywardness, and struck a true balance in estimating the character. In each the Scot responded to the Scot, and that although Byron could say of his friend " he is the most English of writers."⁵ He meant, possibly, that Scott, with all his intense nationalism, always had his eye on the English public, and adapted his writing most shrewdly to that end, without sacrificing fidelity to Caledonian character. In all leal-heartedness to his country and coimtrymen he took care so to present his portraits that they should never be unintelligible to the " Fause Southron." But for Byron's northern unbringing and his experience of Scottish ways and Scottish speech, he would never have been so closely drawn either to Scott the man or Scott the writer. In him he saw no fault. Scott, older and wiser, knew all the weak points of, Byron, not only in ethics, but in accomplishment. He, with his vast stores of information, remarked that the younger man's reading did not seem to him to have been " very extensive either in poetry or history." This criticism is purely relative : Scott's knowledge was enormous. Byron's reading was certainly wide enough, but Scott's verdict, when all due allowances are made, arouses the reflection that Byron was very clever at putting all his goods in the front window; yet he had whatever materials he wanted readily at command, and could bring off an elaborate effect without undue savour of the lamp : witness the easy co-ordination of parallel instances from European

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

history in Angiolina's speech.¹ It is remarkable how, in such passages, he evaded the appearance of pedantry. He abhorred the pedantic, but respected true learning, especially in Scotsmen :

Strongbow's good things might have come from Cato.

That was a compliment to Erskine. His feeling, on reaction, for Jeffrey was equally cordial. After *The Edinburgh Review* had changed its time, Byron regarded Jeffrey as the only man who, in the face of what had happened on both sides, would have had the liberality to act thus : " none but a great soul dared hazard it." They never met in the flesh, but among Byron's Scottish friends Jeffrey held a place second only to that of Sir Walter; and it was he, and not Scott, who inspired the most tenderly enthusiastic memory of the associations which he had carried away with him from the north.

Besides his recollection of blue hills and clear streams, Byron brought with him to England an Aberdonian accent, which patrician Harrow was waiting to eliminate, but could not eliminate wholly. Dr. Guthrie² speaks of " that Aberdonian accent which men have carried to India and have brought back unimpaired after forty years "; similarly, some echo of the northern speech lingered to the end on Byron's tongue. However indig-
nantly he repelled the suggestion of " a heedless girl "

1 " Marino Faliero," Act V, Scene I.

2 In his Autobiography.

THE SCOT IN BYRON

(very likely Jane Clairmont, for Mrs. Shelley told Moore the anecdote)¹ that he had a Scotch accent, his irritable rejoinder on the occasion seems only to emphasise conscious guilt. Leigh Hunt spoke of Byron's "Northumbrian burr"—all northern accents would sound alike to one born almost within the sound of Bow Bells. Surer evidence lies in the freedom, delight and appropriateness with which the vernacular word or phrase rose to Byron's tongue and pen throughout his life.

We remember "bogle," "anent," "tocher," "brochan," "bedral," "gloaming," "paiks," "fey" (for whey), his careful explanation of "squeel" for "school," "skirr the country," "shilpit," "sma' peculiar," "thin" (in the sense of "a small concourse"—"Don Juan," xii. 17, and "Cain," Act II); the Dugald Dalgetty reminiscence "certiorated"; and, most remarkable, "hurl" (in the sense of propelling a vehicle): "And the tired nag the wheel forgets to hurl" ("Childe Harold," Canto I, 59). Very often his rhymes indicate a northern ear; good examples are the false assonances "guard" and "reward," "ever" and "river"—the last word rhymed with "ever" plainly betraying a typical Aberdonian pronunciation. The Aberdonian diminutives came to him naturally, otherwise he would never have written his comic jingle to Hobhouse :

¹ R. Heme Shepherd: "Prose and Verse by Thomas Moore." Moore names Mrs. Shelley in his rough note-book, but not in the "Life."

BYRON. IN PERSPECTIVE

What did the House upon this call,
My boy Hobbie, O?
They voted me to Newgate, all
Which is an awkward Jobby, O.

Further proof follows in the lines :

As Member for the Mobby, O,

and

You founded a Whig Clubbie, O.

Even so near at hand as Edinburgh they laugh at the northern fondness for use of the diminutive, and thin*: it singular-sounding; but here Byron, the Aberdeen laddie, falls into it without a thought of possible oddity or misunderstanding in the ears of his English audience. Yet let not vernacular enthusiasts make too much capital out of this. Byron understood the northern Doric so little philologically that he could write without a blush in the Notes to " Childe Harold " : " a Romaic as notoriously corrupt as the Scotch of Aberdeenshire." Disheartening; but—well, Homer sometimes nods'

Byron was a Scot in sympathies, in pride of ancestry, in love of the land of mountain and of flood. Eight early and most impressionable years beside the Dee had left a permanent mark upon his character, and he could eveda dare to write : " Half English as I am, to my misfortune." Above all, he was a Scot in his perfervid genius, which made its most glowing and eloquent

242,

THE SCOT IN BYRON

response to anything that recalled the scenes of his childhood :

My heart flies to my head,
As "Auld Lang Syne " brings Scotland, one and all,
Scotch plaids, Scotch snoods, the blue hills and clear
streams,

The Dee, the Don, Balgounie's *brig's black wall*.

All my boy feelings, all my gentler dreams
Of what I *then dreamt*, clothed with their own pall
like Banquo's offspring :—floating past me seems
My childhood in this childishness of mine;
I care not—'tis a glimpse of "Auld Lang Syne."

XV. BYRON IN HIS BURLESQUE EPIC

NO poet was ever franker in his self-revelation than Byron; and so, in one sense, his complete reflection can be caught only by consideration of his works in their entirety. But such a portrait calls for heavy discounts. It would include traits that are not the real man, but the man he either imagined himself to be or wished to appear. In the poems before "Don Juan" and its light and brilliant precursor, "Beppo," the conventional Byronic hero still held the stage. That figure was an obvious impostor. If he wore the tragic mask—all too plainly a piece of theatrical property hired for the occasion—it was not until the poet put on the comic sock that he really found himself, for then he had no need of a mask. Some remnant of pose may have remained in his defiance of a hostile world; but the defiance, stripped of exaggerations inevitable to his temperament, was sincere. Byron was born a satirist, and in that vein his genius moved with an ease and opportunity it lacked elsewhere.

Other works may contain passages of greater poetic worth, but "Don Juan," whatever its offences, represents Byron in his most complete humanity, **all** the more human because it is human to err. The Bernesque-Whistlecraft satire stands by itself in English **poetry**.

BYRON IN HIS BURLESQUE EPIC

There had been nothing like it before. The feat cannot be repeated. Its amazing qualities arise from free expression of an amazing personality. When Byron came to the task he was throwing off the obsession of his stucco *Doppel-ganger*. That gloomy tragedian faded out of "Childe Harold" at the fifty-fifth stanza of the third canto. At the best he was but a lay figure. Yet his creator loved him well, which in itself is an indication of something amiss, for genius often prefers its less excellent work.¹

Of "Childe Harold," Byron wrote to Murray: "I look upon it as my best, and as I have begun I think of concluding with it, but I make no resolutions on that head, as I broke my former intention with regard to the *Corsair*. However, I fear I shall never do better, and yet not being thirty years of age for some moons to come, one ought to be progressing as far as intellect goes for many a good year, but I have had a devilish deal of wear and tear of mind and body in my time, besides having published too often and too much already. God grant me some judgment to do what may be most fitting in that and everything else, for I doubt my own exceedingly." That was written from Venice in September 1817.

On April 28rd, 1818, he wrote to Murray: "If Beppo pleases, you shall have more in a year or two in the

¹ Not every great artist has the perception of Josef Israels, who said to a President of the Royal Scottish Academy: "When I say to myself 'That is good; how came you to paint so fine?', then say I to myself 'That is *bad!*'"

BYRON UN PERSPECTIVE

same mood, and so good morrow to you, good Master Lieutenant." And on June 1st, to the same correspondent: " You like Beppo—that's right," The experiment in the Bernesque style succeeded, and gave Byron his cue for a more elaborate effort in the same vein.

fin. July he told Murray that he had two stories, one serious and one ludicrous, *a la* Beppo, not yet finished and in no hurry to be so; and a week later he tells his publisher " that he once wrote from the fulness of his mind and the love of fame (not as an end but a means) *to obtain that influence over men's minds which is power :in itself and in its consequences, and now from habit and from avarice, go that the effect may probably be as different as the inspiration. I have the same facility, and indeed necessity of composition to avoid idleness (though idleness in a hot country is a pleasure) but a much greater indifference as to what is to become of it after it has served my immediate purpose.' In a post-script he says : " I shall be glad of Whistlecraft." In September 1824 he writes again to Murray : " I have written the first canto of a poem in the style of Beppo."

In January 1810 Byron indicated what was passing in his mind with regard to the work he had in hand. He had requested Murray to get the opinion of some of his friends on the first canto. He asked them, he says, with regard to poetical merit, and not as to what they may think due to the cant of the day which still reads *The Bath Guide*," Little's Poems, Prior and Chaucer, to say nothing of Fielding and Smollett. " If published,

246

BYRON IN HIS BURLESQUE EPIC

publish entire, or you may publish anonymously or not at all." There are to be certain excisions, including the lines on Castlereagh, " as he is not on the spot to meet him." The friends in England were seriously alarmed, and although Byron acquiesced in the request and representation of the objectors—his " Puritan Committee "—[^]adding : " It is idle to detail my arguments - in favour of my own self-love and Poeshie, but I *protest*. If the poem has poetry it would stand; if not fall: the trest is leather and prunella and has never yet affected any human production, ' pro or con.' Dullness is the only annihilator in such cases . . . if you admit this prudery you must omit half Ariosto, La Fontaine, .Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Massinger, Ford, all the Charles Second writers; in short, something of most Who have written before Pope and are worth reading, and much of Pope himself . . . I write in a passion and a sirocco, and I was up till six this morning at the [^]Carnival; but I *protest*."

In April, announcing to Murray the despatch of the second canto, Byron is still in the protesting mood : "I will permit no curtailments, except those mentioned, you shan't make *canticles* of my cantos. The poem will please, if it is lively; if it is stupid, it will fail; but I will 'have none of your damned cutting and slashing. If you please you may publish *anonymously*, it will perhaps be better; but I will batter my way against them all, like a porcupine."

Ugo Foscolo, Moore, Hobhouse and Murray had

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

wanted the poet to undertake a great work. Byron satirises " great work " by the use of inverted commas, and adds : " an epic poem, I suppose, or some such pyramid. I'll try no such thing, I hate tasks. And then ' seven or eight years! ' God send us all well this day three months, let alone years! . . . And works too !—is Childe Harold nothing? . . . you have so many ' divine ' poems—is it nothing to have written a *human* one? without any of your worn out machinery. Why, man, I could have spun the thoughts of the four cantos of that poem into twenty, had I wanted to book-make, and its passion into as many modern tragedies. Since you want *length*, you shall have enough of *Juan*, for I'll make fifty cantos . . . Neither will I make ' Ladies' books ' . . . I have written from the fulness of my mind, from passion, from impulse, from many motives, but not for their ' sweet voices.'"

In that temper Byron began his burlesque epic, and, with the usual variations of mood—the ups and downs of genius anxious for its offspring—in that temper he carried it through. Murray had said something about refinement, and is set down smartly : "Are you so moral? No such thing."⁵⁹ Byron knows what the world is in England from his experience of the best of it—at least of the loftiest—and he has described it as he found it in all places. The reception of the first two cantos, and the objections they called forth, discouraged him. He warns his publisher that they are not good, and he adds that he has told him the reason. But soon after that a

248

BYRON IN HIS BURLESQUE EPIC

piece of faint or, rather, limited praise put him in high key once more, and he defends his bantling : " You say that *one half* is very good : you are *wrong*; for if it were, it would be the finest poem in existence. *Where* is the poetry of which *one half* is good ? is it the *Aeneid*? is it *Milton's*? is it *Dryden's*? is it anyone's except *Pope's* and *Goldsmith's*, of which *all* is good? . . . **But** if *one half* of the two new Cantos be good in your opinion, what the devil would you have more ? No—no; no poetry is *generally* good—only by fits and starts—and you are lucky to get a sparkle here and there. You might as well want a midnight *all stars* as rhyme all perfect."

The critics who have used " Don Juan " hardly, merely because Byron fails to give them the verbal felicity, the perfection of finish, the remote delicacy of thought and the sustained loftiness of style demanded by their own ideal of poetry, seem to have lost sight of his intention. It is as if a critic of Greek comic verse were to discredit Aristophanes for his metrical licences. And, even at his most careless, Byron has the " sparkle " in some line or kink of phrase. " Bellman's rhyme," no doubt, it sounds if we read with the harmonies of " The Blessed Damozel " or " Atalanta " lingering in our ears, but that is scarcely the fair attitude. Who reads the " Aeharnians " or the " Lysistrata " in the mood in which one approaches " (Edipus the King," or would take the Mimes of Herondas as the critical touchstone for " Antigone " ? " Now there are three

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

IMAds/"says Aristdfle, and a 'little remembrance of what is due to things in themselves distinct and capable df individual virtues would save much confusion and injustice; unwarrantable demanding of the virtues of one kind from another. The criticism of poetry always tends towards an esoteric cult, and becomes in consequence enfeebled. Catholicity alone can maintain it in true health and 'wigour. Matthew Arnold broke away from exclusive tuperiority when he championed Byron. There he approached a real catholicity. His opponents clung only the more closely to their esoteric pieties. On these, they conceived, he had laid a sacrilegious hand, and their wrath was that of the wounded hierophattt who sees'his god's altar desecrated.

The canons of an esoteric cult cannot be applied to ^Byron's burlesque epic, if we are to arrive at any right appreciation of that *tour de force*. To do so is to "attempt to judge the general by the particular. The poet's intention was general in the widest sense. It was to embrace all Europe in its scope—all life. He himself foresaw no limits to the work. With that in mind, he knew it could not be uniformly good, and he had the honeity to confess it. The ancestral Gordon gaiety and recklessness went to its making. The poem was a huge adventure. Here at last he found himself. His hero was mo longer an artificial puppet of pinchbeck romance, dressed up in the theatrical trappings of the outlaw. Here were to be no trumped-up sorrows of a mysterious ^evil-doer, but the emotions of the average man, height-360

BYRON JIN HIS BURLESQUE EPIC

cned indeed, but such as Everyman could understand. Heightened, because an epic must have a hero—no matter though he be, as here, something of a makeshift hero—but not heightened beyond the sympathy of ordinary mortals. Even in the highest flight, the incomparable record of the ecstasy of young love, in the Juan and Haidee episode, it is but the love that comes to all men, even the least heroic, once, and once only. For all men that emotion is supreme; no poet can exalt it beyond the understanding of plain men. "If," says Robert Burns, "anything on earth may deserve the name of rapture or transport, it is the feelings of green eighteen, *in the company of the mistress of his heart, when she repays him with an equal return of affection.*"

It has been charged against Byron that he never recaptured the excellence of that Ionian Idyll, and it is quoted to his hurt, in disparagement of the later cantos. But the things simply could not be. It was not in nature that Juan could know any return of that passion, in the perfections of the interlude with Haidee. The earlier Julia incident fades before it into a mere exploit of puppyism. He never loved Julia, who is the really blameworthy party in that disreputable affair. Her years, if nothing else, should have given her discretion. At twenty-three a Spanish married lady has all the sense she is likely ever to possess. Byron, who is not usually accused, as Dr. Donne¹ was accused by his Dutch critics, of "super-human" subtlety, has here some touch of that quality.

1 Grierson: "Donne's Poetical Works," 1912.

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

He detected the exact point at which Julia deliberately put scruple aside. Hers was no passion of a Haidee, to " fly to her young mate like a young bird." She was the reflecting, experienced married woman, amused and flattered with a boy's adoration. Her creator exposes her in three lines, less superficially explanatory than " whispering Ml ne'er consent, consented " :

Yet still she must have thought there was no harm,
Or else 'twere easy to withdraw her waist;
But then the situation had its charm. . . .

Perhaps Julia came to love Juan, but more likely " all she loved was love." Her famous letter fits either case. Certain it is, Juan was heart-whole when he met Haidee. For Julia he had not a thought. The counterfeit little god was dead and buried by that time. It was otherwise when he met Gulbeyaz : almost he remained faithful to Haidee's memory, but he was made in his creator's image. Fidelity, had circumstances allowed, would have run a bad second. Juan was the same man who had always before him as an ironic reflection of his own character the words

Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor.

Not altogether in cynical mockery, therefore, did he write, " My poem's moral, or is meant to be," and invite his readers to read again and see his purpose.

BYRON IN HIS BURLESQUE EPIC

The nightingale that sings with the deep thorn,
Which fable places in her breast of wail,
Is lighter far of heart and breast than those
Whose headlong passions form their proper woes.

And that's the moral of this composition,
If people would but see its real drift.

That his incidents were not always moral was only part of the scheme of this precursor of the realists. To-day these practitioners out-Byron Byron in frankness and go scot-free. They even receive Hawthornden prizes from grave and reverend signiors. But the echo of old scandal still prolongs the belief that "Don Juan" is aimless wantonness, that the poet was out merely to dance the Kordax, to scandalise the serious and make the boys laugh. Something there was of that, and at times the *Deteriora Sequi* took the upper hand, but under all lay a definite purpose of showing the proper end of that error. Whether Juan was to die on the guillotine or no, his history was to be a gradual decrescendo with a hint of eschatology—"A panoramic view of hell's in training," which, had it been written, would have carried the hero a little farther than the flaming trap-door of the operatic stage, thus anticipating Mr. Bernard Shaw's view of Don Juan in Gehenna. For that bourne he set out irrevocably at the moment when he wavered in his resolution to resist Gulbeyaz. If Juan was Byron's Moscow, the Sultana was Juan's, although the intrigue came to nothing. His wavering, his forgetfulness of Haidee, was

the crucial point. He had complied with **Gulbayaz**, if not in act, at least in thought, and thenceforth he was a rake confirmed. That his probable damnation should date from a thought rather than an act is not surprising in the light of Byron's early religious training and his constant study of the Scriptures. Chapter and verse for the situation are obvious. The choosing of it is rather a finer stroke of ethics than is usually set to the poet's credit.

Into his epic Byron threw all the ferment of his brain, conscious and sub-conscious. Ancestral tendencies, bad and good—love, lust, rage, hate, impulsive generosity, malice, human-kindness, fire-eating, gallant, *insouciance* and the passion for adventure, the rebellion against, wrong, contempt for cant and shams, and withal a manly candour and Tightness of feeling, constantly defeated by a malignant instability—contended in that chaos. The mental inheritance of ancestors who had defied convention, who had plotted, robbed, murdered, lived, loosely, died on battlefields and on scaffolds, squandered their substance on all passions that impoverish men, added to a most stormy and diverse personal experience of life, at last found its adequate vehicle of expression through the original genius of a "maker." In all earlier work Byron spoke through a mouthpiece; in *Juan* he spoke for himself. Even Childe Harold was a projection, a pseudo-romantic figure, already saddened by life before he entered upon the scene, and making the most of his sorrows for the sake of effect. *Juan* does nothing for effect. He begins as "a

254

BYRON IN HIS BURIESQBfc EPIC

little curly-headed gooi for nothing "; and although he gathers disillusion and a few passing pangs on his journey through life, still he smiles and keeps up his original character of buoyant transgressor to the point where the story breaks off. At the close of Canto XVI—which Fate decreed was to be final, save a fragment—he is on the verge of new mischief, for once not of his seeking. The trap laid for him by his amorous destiny is a satire on country-house manners, as true to-day, in certain circles, as it was in the poet's*

If Byron carried his ethical purpose with a light' and even a wanton hand, it was not therefore insincere, andj as has been hinted, it may at times be deeper and more subtle than appears on the surface. The lightness was only in keeping with the whole construction of the poem. B^ron guided his pen, as Walter Seott said, " with the careless ease of a man of quality." Character, incident, phrase, rhyme so thronged upon his fancy that he could not stay to select. If rhyme, rhythm, style, poetic dignity or ethics took a toss, no matter—on with the chase—" the pace was too good to enquire." All was fish that came to his net: he cast it wide over Europe; the throw was co-extensive with his own rich experience. Like a later poet, he " had drifted with all passions till his soul became a lute on which all winds might play," but he did not, like that other, mourn any consequent loss of " ancient honour " and " austere control." He had found his instrument, and he revelled in playing it. Although he acknowledged that the time could not be

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

faultless, he knew equally well that there were moments at which he had struck chords beyond the skill, in just that kind, of any other singer. By these he would stand or fall.

Alive to the disadvantages of "this sort of desultory rhyme," he acknowledged his conversational style and pretended to be no more than the Improvisatore. It was a right instinct that led to the choice of that method. The Grand Manner would have turned "Don Juan" into a piece of frigid didacticism. The poem is the first unmistakable product of the new age. Except for the trick of rhetorical point and balance which he still kept in reserve for cunning use, Byron had now broken finally with eighteenth century stiffness. He reflects the coming of the Modern World and the scientific era—"What wondrous new machines have late been spinning," and "this is the patent age of new inventions."

Man's a phenomenon, one knows not what,
And wonderful beyond all wondrous measure;
Ever since Newton saw the apple fall,

. . . Immortal man hath glowed
With all kinds of mechanics, and full soon
Steam engines will conduct him to the moon.

To the poet's imagination, however, that is but a meagre flight. In the next stanza he declares that he at least

. . . has shunned the common shore
And leaving land far out of sight, would skim
The Ocean of Eternity. . . .

BYRON IN HIS BURLESQUE EPIC

'—one of those sudden fetches of imagination in which the Improvisatore, " Writing what's uppermost, without delay," ranges himself with the highest; but he moves so quickly to the next thought, less sublime in all likelihood, that the transition blurs the finer figure. We scarcely realise how frequent are his excursions to the stars.

Between two worlds life hovers like a star
'Twixt night and morn upon the horizon's verge.
How little do we know that which we are!
How less what may be ! The eternal surge
Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
Our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge,
Lashed from the foam of ages; while the graves
Of empires heave but like some passing waves,

Byron was justified when he told Murray, " but it is poetry," and when, with the humour so many deny him (because it is an odd restrained humour, Scottish in descent and best appreciated, perhaps, by Scotsmen), he could write " Still, I am, or was, a pretty poet," or throw out a suggestion that in his next canto

. • . perhaps I shall
Say something to the purpose and display
Considerable talent in my way.

It was northern humour, too, that gave him a proverb with which to forecast the result of his experiment in Burlesque Epic : " I will either make a spoon or spoil a horn." All was to be without plan—" the soul of writ-

XVI, THE HELLENIC ENTHUSIASM

LIKE every other element in Lord Byron's character, his enthusiasm for Greece is something of a contradiction. In the public mind, Byron and Greece have become inseparable if not synonymous, and, except to the specially informed, there clings about this part of his fame something of a professorial halo. It is only natural to suppose that the man who had so intimate an acquaintance with Hellas, who sang her praises in burning verse, and who died in the attempt to win back her liberty, must have been inspired by the vision of classical antiquity, and profoundly learned in all things Grecian. Such a view, however, is wide of the mark, and requires considerable revision. Although well grounded in the Ancient Classics at school, Byron was never, in the technical sense, an accomplished scholar, nor were the niceties of classical scholarship of particular interest to him. Of the Greek writers' influence his works show few traces so direct as the paraphrase of Sappho in "Don Juan," III. 107. Yet in his Note, he quotes the Greek imperfectly and corruptly. The poems contain, it is true, a wealth of apposite classical allusions, but the most of these are to the Latin authors. Horace he knew well, and could quote him with a deftness and point that would have stood him in good stead had he followed a political career. In his list of books read before he was nineteen, Byron

200

THE HELLENIC ENTHUSIASM

included under the heading of Greece: Mitford's "Greece," Leland's "Philip," Plutarch, Potter's "Antiquities," Xenophon, and Thucydides. In another part of the list, under "Eloquence," he mentions Demosthenes alone of Greek authors, and under Geography, Strabo. He says that as a boy he was passionately fond of the "Prometheus" of Aeschylus, which was one of the Greek plays read thrice a year at Harrow; that and the "Medea" were the only ones, except the "Seven Against Thebes," which ever much pleased him. The "Prometheus," he adds, if not exactly in his plan for "Manfred," had always been so much in his head that he could easily conceive its influence over all or anything that he had written. With regard to Homer, he says that he "read that poet as we have all done, some of us by force, and a few by favour; under which description I come is nothing to the purpose, it is enough that I read him. As a child I first read Pope's Homer with a rapture which no subsequent work could ever afford, and children are not the worst judges of their own language." This enthusiasm for Pope's translation was very much alive as late as 1821, and was equalled only by his contempt for Cowper's version. Although Byron's fondness for Pope is justified as a criticism of English poetry, it leaves one doubtful how far his study of the original had given him a just appreciation of the quintessential Homer. That he had at command a considerable knowledge of the more obvious details of the Homeric machinery, is manifest from his letter to

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

although the " marbled " was a characteristic addition of his own arising from his conception of the Grecian Spirit of Place. With Anacreon he was early familiar, and his few formal translations from the Greek—mostly schoolboy exercises—are from that author, Aeschylus and Euripides. In a chorus from the " Medea "—the lines containing the pretty paraphrase

Who ne'er unlocks with silver key
The milder treasures of his soul—

his quotation of the original line, curiously enough, has a misprint that persisted even into the Oxford Edition of Byron. He quotes the Gnostic poets, and corroborates Hesiod's description of a Boeotian winter. For the epigraph to his epitaph on a friend, he uses the epitaph on Plato, quoted by Diogenes Laertius, with which author he was well acquainted. He had, however, other authorities : Barthelemy, De Pauw, who might be referred to, together with Diogenes, " if agreeable." He has a neat hand at the illustrative cross-reference, always to the point; as when he explains a curious superstition in a Romaic song with the anecdote which tells how Socrates believed he had received a physical hurt from having happened merely to touch one of his companions.

Socrates, Byron venerated, but Plato, or rather the popular notion of Platonic love, offered him an irresistible target for light badinage, and it is doubtful how far he was acquainted with the actual text of the philosopher.

264

THE HELLENIC ENTHUSIASM

Possibly his knowledge of the Platonic circle was not very profound, and may have been derived principally from Xenophon's "Memorabilia." In his list of the philosophers he had read at nineteen, no Greek name appears; but he had ample time to atone for that deficiency, and he knew, at least, the "Phaedo," in which the sunset touch inspired him to the opening of the third canto of "The Corsair." Of that passage he says: "The opening lines have perhaps but little business here, but they were written on the spot in the Spring of 1811 and—I scarce know why—the reader must excuse their appearance here if he can." The closing line contains a remote but unmistakable echo of Aeschylus.

All this looks like erudition, and erudition it was of a sort, for Byron made no pretensions to, and had little sympathy with, minute critical scholarship. He could not forbear a dig at his fellow Cantabridgians who prized

. . . Bentley's, Brunek's, or Porson's note
More than the verse on which the critic wrote.

For Porson himself, the greatest Greek scholar of his time, he had no regard at all, and went so far as to write that "he could hiccup Greek like a Helot, and certainly Sparta never shocked her children with a grosser exhibition than this man's intoxication"—even Byron's erudition was not equal to appeasing Porson's rage on the night that he left the company because nobody knew the name of the Cobbler of Messina.

Byron's knowledge of Greek literature was drawn

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

principally from his reading of the Historians, the Travellers, and the Biographers, either in the original or in translation. He knew his Plutarch, his Pausanias and Strabo, his Xenophon, Thucydides and Herodotus, and among English authors, Mitford, Leland and Potter. The story of the Ten Thousand was often in his hand; and his wide reading as well as his knowledge of the country stood him in good stead when, in 1811, the "Monthly Review" asked him to review Gell's "Geography of Ithaca and Itinerary of Greece." The last paragraph of the review is significant in its plea that Grecian tourists should turn their mind to the language of the country. Byron notes that so strikingly similar to the ancient Greek is the modern Romaic as a written language, and so dissimilar in sound, that even a few general rules concerning pronunciation would be of the utmost use. He was not, however, moved to supply this need himself.

The poet's attitude towards Greece was romantic rather than classical, although the classical may have appealed to him more than he would admit.. His knowledge never urged him towards any literary restoration of the essential spirit of Greek poetry. With all his wider Hellenic information Byron never approached so near to the spirit of pure classicism as did Keats, who by Byron's own confession

. . . without Greek

Contrived to speak about the Gods of late

Much as they might have been supposed to speak.

THE HELLENIC ENTHUSIASM

Although he might be inclined to think that something of Prometheus informed his Manfred, he could not transmute Attic Tragedy as Shelley transmuted it in "Prometheus Unbound," for he lacked Shelley's delicate classical sense and finer scholarship. Such a *tour de force* as Tennyson's "Teiresias" did not lie within his hand—or rather, within his inclination, for he was equal to achievement of that sort, but preferred to choose as his medium the Poetry of Mediaeval and Renaissance Italy. Of this, the "Lament of Tasso" and the "Prophecy of Dante" are the enduring monuments. He attempted no sustained translation of any Greek play, for he did not feel the inevitable scholarly promptings of a Browning to such a task. Although he had a turn of mind that might have produced something memorable in the vein of Aristophanes' "Apology," of his familiarity with the great poet of the Old Comedy the traces are faint. It is true that he praises Mitchell's translation of Aristophanes in the tone of an expert, but no evidence substantiates Byron's technical qualifications to pronounce upon this question. He never seems fully to have appreciated the cold, statuesque attributes of Greek art; or if he did, his appreciation was smothered by his dread of the cant and jargon of current criticism. He was very angry with Lord Elgin for removing the frieze of the Parthenon, but for the statuary itself he betrayed no great enthusiasm, and conceded, with a characteristic indulgence in alliteration, that it looked **as well** in Piccadilly as on the Parthenon. To the

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

classical method, revived by a modern hand, he was more tolerant, and allowed himself a rhapsodic flight over the Helen of Canova—but there, again, the compliment was rather to Italy than to Greece.

Byron affected to maintain that the natural beauties of Greece were always more to him than the literary or historical associations. He snubbed those who approached the country with the high-flown notions of "the sixth form at Harrow or Eton," and, to the fatuous gentleman who remarked "You must have been highly gratified by the classical remains and recollections which you met with in your visit to Ithaca," he replied: "You quite mistake me, I have no poetical humbug about me. I am too old for that. Ideas of that sort are confined to rhyme." This was the controversial Byron, always fencing and never willing to give an opening to those who would gratuitously interpret his thoughts. It was the very habit that he imputed to Conrad:

Too close inquiry his stern glance would quell

He had the skill when Cunning's glance would seek
To probe his heart and watch his changing cheek
At once the observer's purpose to espy,
And on himself roll back his scrutiny.

The denial can scarcely be taken as sincere, for Byron **had**, beyond doubt, a feeling for the monuments of ancient art. Although he protested that the natural

268

THE HELLENIC ENTHUSIASM

scenery of Greece, particularly in the north, moved him more than any historical association, he made an exception in the case of Attica. "Am I to be told that the nature of Attica would be more poetical without the art of the Acropolis, of the temple of Theseus, and of the still all Greek and glorious monuments of her exquisitely artificial genius? Ask the traveller what strikes him as most poetical, the Parthenon or the rock on which it stands, the columns of Cape Colonna or the Cape itself. . . . It is the art, the columns, the temples . . . which give them their antique poetry, and not the spots themselves. Without them the spots of earth would be unnoticed and unknown." If these were Byron's feelings just two years before he snubbed his boring inquisitor, it is scarcely likely that in the interval they had greatly changed. It is probably a revelation of his true sentiments; and yet it is difficult to be sure, for at that moment he was bringing up all his heavy artillery to "bowl down," as he said, the Reverend Mr. Bowles. In the same letter to Murray, he exclaims, "I stood upon the Symplegades—I stood by the broken altar still exposed to the winds upon one of them—I felt all the poetry of the situation as I repeated the first lines of Medea; but would not that poetry have been heightened by the Argo, it was so even by the appearance of any merchant vessel arriving from Odessa."

This feeling for the poetry of the situation did not prevent Byron from making very unpoetical use of the opening lines of the same "Medea."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

On this whole question his mind was forever vibrating between the classical and the romantic, the ancient and the modern. The romantic and the modern kept breaking in. Below Cape Sunium lay a recent wreck, an object of irresistible appeal to the poet, calling up perhaps the beach at Aberdeen, and certainly "My Grand-dad's Narrative/" together with Hackery's "Shipwreck of the Juno," read at Dr. Glennie's—works formative of memorable passages in his own poems. The wreck competes with the ruined columns, and gives to Cape Sunium a modern touch contending with the classical.

Byron's indeterminate attitude towards Greece and the Greeks may have arisen partly from the fact that he never, with all his wide knowledge, entered into the pure scholar's ideal, and partly because his earliest enthusiasm for the country had been awakened, not by Greek literature (of which at the time he did not know a word) but by Turkish histories, with their inevitable Oriental glamour. Although he wished to break the Turkish oppression, he had always a greater respect for the Turks than for the Greeks. About the latter he had no illusions. He saw them debased and dishonest, but he held that British opinion had been led astray, as much by panegyrics as by depreciations. "The Greeks," he said, "will never be independent, they will never be sovereigns as heretofore, and God forbid they ever should, but they may be subjects without being slaves." He would not wholly endorse the remark of a French

270

THE HELLENIC ENTHUSIASM

merchant that the Greeks were the same *canaille* as existed in the days of Themistocles, for he saw that the critic spoke from disappointed self-interest; but at the same time he could not deny himself a little fling at the conventional classicists, "The stricture," he said, "is an alarming remark to the *Laudator temporis acti*." Yet for all his clear view of Modern Greek degeneracy he held that there was "reasonable hope of the redemption of the race of men who, whatever may be the errors of their religion and policy, have been amply punished by three centuries and a half of captivity."

Byron, hostile to pedants, had nevertheless in him a vein of pedantry, and had he been more pliable to the schoolmaster, he might have fallen very completely into the pedagogic way. His studies in Modern Greek were extensive; he knew the field, and he took every opportunity of making the personal acquaintance of the leading authorities. He was even entrusted with a commission for printing in London a Romaic translation of Barthemy's "Anacharsis." He was a diligent collector (although he would have hated the name) of Romaic poetry, including folk-songs, which he judged with sure instinct. He was quick to recognise the merit of Riga's fine "War-song" *Δεῦτε παῖδες τῶν Ἑλλήνων*. This he pronounced the best of Modern Greek songs, and it inspired him to a translation as spirited and fervid as his own "Isles of Greece." In his notes on the works of modern Greek Literati, Byron must have smiled with a slight inclination of his tongue towards his cheek when

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

he recorded that his acquaintance Psalida had published, in Romaic and Latin, a work on " True Happiness," dedicated to Catherine II, of whose hedonism he was afterwards to make satirical sport.

Of Byron's actual proficiency in Ancient Greek, no record has been left by any competent authority. It may be doubted whether he had sufficient mastery of the language to " read Plato with his feet on the fender," or, had he allowed himself that classic indulgence, he could have enjoyed it with Macaulay's immunity from the lexicon, only looking out a strange word when he met it for the second time. That was Macaulay's plan when he read as a man of the world and not as a strict student; it is possible and profitable only to one who already possessed the vast vocabulary of a Macaulay. Byron certainly read like a man of the world, but his scholarship, such as it is, leaves the impression that the intervals between lexicographic difficulties would have been far shorter than those which permitted the historian an almost uninterrupted enjoyment. But it was his man-of-the-world attitude towards his reading that gave Byron an invaluable equipment for the part he was to play in letters and in life. Moore saw that; and on his view he founded a homily upon the hostility of contemporary classical education to the poetic genius, which brought him into hot water with the *Quarterly Review*. To Byron the purely scholastic methods of his own day would have been of little use, and it was a wise intuition that led him to take his own line. The present century,

272

THE HELLENIC ENTHUSIASM

curiously enough, with its sharp reaction against the ancient classics, has forced scholars of the older type to devise, in self-defence, a modification of their system not at all unlike Byron's independent mode of study. There is less exclusive deification of texts and a freer use of translations, not as mere "cribs," but as a means of extending knowledge of ancient literature beyond the narrow confines of class work. Byron may not have been definitely imitated by the pedagogues and professors, but he may have influenced to some extent their choice of a *modus vivendi*, and so, in another sense than the political, he may yet be recognised as the saviour of Greece.

It must not be forgotten that he had an ampler facility and range in his acquaintance with the great derivative of Greek culture, Latin literature. Here his knowledge was of exactly the same kind as that of Greek. In both cases it was based, first of all, on authors drummed into him at school and not loved for their own sake. These were supplemented by extensive reading in Roman History, a taste which he owed, as he generously acknowledged, to his private tutor in Aberdeen, Mr. Ross. In the final analysis, Byron's Hellenic enthusiasm is in all probability to be traced to his historical rather than his literary sense. He had seen the Glory that was Greece and the Grandeur that was Rome. Had fortune favoured him he would have played his part in the liberation of Italy. When that project failed, he was driven back upon the other conception, which held for him a more intimate,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

more personal and more complex attraction. The Greece he knew was still a part of Turkey, and about it clung an Oriental fascination which fed one part of his nature. That fascination, far more than any charm of pure Hellenism, first turned his steps to the East: but with the cloudy vapours of the chibouque and the images of odalisques there mingled in that chaotic and contending mind a rooted devotion to the idea of liberty of which Greece was the supreme example. Out of these likes and dislikes his last enterprise took gradual shape.

The motive was not entirely without alloy. Its prime object was not the only lure. The *bizarrerie* and unusualness of such an undertaking, headed by a young aristocrat, would make the Tories gape. " It filled him with a secret pride to do what few or none would do beside." And, weightier consideration, it was not Greece alone that was to be restored.

XVII. THE LAST ADVENTURE

THE disillusions of middle life set their seal upon Byron. In many ways his whole life was a series of disillusions, even more than falls to the lot of most men, and the rewards of fame were but indifferent compensation to a spirit that could brook no contradiction. In boyhood and early manhood his continual cry had been that he could keep nothing that he loved : friend after friend was snatched away from him by death. In his thirty-sixth year his retrospect on life was one of gloom, and his prospects were no less clouded. He believed that as a poet he had outworn his welcome from the world.

But with all his disappointments Byron in his secret heart still cherished ambition. For literature he had always affected contempt. The period was one in which the mere writing man was still somewhat disesteemed. The true field for the nobleman of talent was the Senate. The boy who had said proudly in his ninth year, " I hope if you read any speeches of mine it will be in the House of *Lords* " had always an eye upon a political career; and towards the end of his first journey in Greece he could write, characteristically forgetful of " *Childe Harold* "—already well advanced—and of the hopes he built upon the comparatively trifling " *Hints from Horace* " : " I have

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

now done with scribbling." In another letter, written about the same time, when he vows to abjure, not in this instance scribbling, but dissipation, he says he will betake himself to " politics and decorum."

In Italy the old hankering returned; but the Carbonari disappointed him, and his efforts to help the cause of Italian liberty ended in disgust. Yet the hope of distinction in new fields would not be extinguished.

The Italian sojourn had brought him nothing but dissatisfaction. He had run through a succession of light loves, and the one steady flame for Countess Guiccioli was now burning low. Her empire was at an end, and her very presence and persistence had become irksome. Yet he hesitated to throw her over. To make breaks of this kind had formerly cost him little thought or apparent regret, and his hesitation is a testimony to something higher even in that relation. At the best, however, his descent to the position of a *cavaliere servente* was a degradation, possible only to a man whose spiritual vision had been dulled by ignoble affairs, in which Byron touched the nadir of cynical carelessness. The Venetian period had brought the inevitable penalty. But, as the last of these passions cooled, vision had begun to reassert itself, and with it the desire to rehabilitate reputation, not so much poetical as personal. The cry of his twenty-fifth birthday that he had nothing to show for his life except that he was twenty-five, for all its touch of exaggeration, is still an index to his thought. In his chaotic mind a thousand conflicting impulses **were**

THE LAST ADVENTURE

at work : his overwhelming egotism had grown very jealous for itself. He who equalled himself to Napoleon had seen his " little pagod " fall, and the sight must have aroused the question whether he himself was not fated to end in like manner. There was time to retrieve. He feared it might be short, for his health gave him no great expectations of life, but still he would be up and doing. It might be worth while to risk all on a last throw.

He had not far to look for a field of action. His ancestral blood prompted him towards the role of the soldier of fortune. His forebears on both sides had been distinguished in foreign service, and his own earliest dreams had been martial. As a boy, forgetful of his physical disability, he had said he would raise a troop, to be called Byron's Blacks; and during the first Albanian tour he had been able to fancy himself in the character of adventurer.

Partly because he really loved liberty, but more because he loved his own image, and hoped to see himself 'yet fulfilling what he conceived to be his only proper destiny, he let his thoughts turn more and more to the Near East, and Near Eastern politics. He had little trust in the Greeks, with whose character he had become shrewdly acquainted during his first pilgrimage. Still, there might be a chance. Although in native swords and native ranks the only hope of courage dwelt, these were powerless without organisation, and Greece herself gave no signs of producing a leader. He could not hope

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

to contribute much that was practical in actual military direction, but if a wise and statesmanlike organiser could stand behind the fighting line and reconcile intestine dissensions, the Turk might yet be driven out. In the spring of the year 1823, Byron saw his way more plainly to a decision. Overtures from the Greek Committee in England convinced him that his interference would not be inopportune. Better to go than to eat his heart out at Genoa. The die was cast.

Byron did nothing by halves. He surveyed the field, and began to take action with a statesman's prudence and precaution. The first and most urgent question was that of finance, and here he was ready to make unqualified personal sacrifices. His friend Mr. Barry, the Genoa banker, enabled him to raise 10,000 crowns in specie and 40,000 crowns in bills of exchange. He chartered the English brig *Hercules*, and put on board a small amount of arms and stores, including two one-pounders belonging to his own schooner yacht *Bolivar*. His companions were purely civilian, a curious company—the gasconading Trelawny, Dr. Bruno, and Count Gamba, brother of the Countess Guiccioli. It was with difficulty that he prevented the Countess herself from accompanying him, and her insistence all but ruined the chances of making that break with her which he now saw to be inevitable. For the first time in his life, Byron was really serious, and during the whole brief last phase he displayed a growing steadiness of purpose and character for which few would have given him credit. He

278

THE LAST ADVENTURE

now gave evidence of great qualities—foresight, endurance, powers of conciliation, and sound political wisdom—which might one day have raised him to a foremost place in the State, not in Greece alone, but in a wider sphere. Despite that brighter moment, however, Byron has left in men's minds a lingering distrust. "Genius," says Mr. G. M. Trevelyan, "even of the first order, unless it is a genius essentially political rather than imaginative or philosophical, has no claim as of right to control the destinies of a party. We may doubt whether, if Byron had survived, Grey would wisely have included him in the Reform Cabinet."¹ Byron, the potential politician, like his whole career, remains a fascinating speculation.

Doubts, difficulties, and even an actual wavering of will beset him from the very beginning of the adventure. One the thirteenth of July the little party went on board. Once more he had encountered the unlucky number. It is an empty superstition, but the fact remains that the sea rose, the horses broke loose and injured each other, and Byron was kept on deck all night doing what he could to prevent further damage. After four hours' sailing in the teeth of the wind, the captain was forced to put about and return to Genoa. The leader, however, was not to be discouraged, and, on the principle that a bad beginning makes a good ending, told Count Gamba that he thought the mishap rather a favourable omen. There is another story told by Barry, the banker,

1 G. M. Trevelyan; "Lord Grey and the Reform Bill."

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

that Byron would have turned back even at that point, but that Hobhouse and the others would laugh at him.¹ Next day he again defied omens, and set sail finally on a Friday. The mere act of defiance may have lent him some reassurance. Once fairly on the sea he loved, his spirits rose and he was free to indulge whatever dreams may have haunted his imagination. They were not all bright, for on parting with Lady Blessington a few evenings before he had said that he felt he would never return; and the presence of others did not restrain him from an open burst of weeping, which lasted several minutes. To the end he was always something of a child: no practice in the darker ways of the world seemed ever wholly to harden him. Even in his present undertaking, part of his motive, at least, may be referred to that schoolboy delight in the wild Albanian scenery and people which had so arrided him on his first journey to the Near East. He might be going out as the apostle of liberty to the Greeks and as the liberator of his spirit and talents from the trammels of misspent years, but with it all there was something of young delight in the prospect of recapturing those earlier impressions which had fed his romance and given him the cue for the poetry that set him before the world, little though he now professed to esteem his poetical work.

Too often in his former life he had been the victim of illusions, and had been able to make himself believe what he wanted to believe. But in the last adventure

1 Murray; "Lord Byron's Correspondence,"

THE LAST ADVENTURE

he saw things as they were. Romantic associations might form a pleasant background from which he could draw support amid his labours, but his earlier experiences had taught him to understand the qualities and the defects of the people he sought to aid. He was able to shed romance. Too well he knew that it was Greece, but living Greece no more. "I am of St. Paul's opinion," he said, "that there is no difference between Jews and Greeks, the character of both being equally vile." As the work went forward, the conviction grew on him that his effort would not pave the way to a wider field of action at home. His attempt resolved itself into a hazard for posthumous recognition of the better part of Byron. That thought can be inferred, not from any actual word of his at this time, but from a remark he made in his diary when he thought that he might be able to do for Italy what he was now doing for Greece : "What signifies self if a single spark of that which would be worthy of the past can be bequeathed unreservedly to the future? "

His conduct was that of one who had grasped the main principles of statesmanship. During the first weeks, when at Cephalonia, he examined the state of parties, and saw that these were hopelessly dissentient, that he must not entangle himself with any. Through his agents, Messrs. Brown & Trelawny, he made touch with the Provisional Government, who, although welcoming his presence, immediately embarrassed him by requesting him to take action for which he had no

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

proper preparation. Metaxa, the Governor of Missolonghi—then blockaded by the Turks—begged him to come at once to the relief of that place; while Colocotroni, the head of the military chiefs, was equally urgent that he should attend the Congress of Salona, then about to be convened to settle the affairs of the country. He was persecuted by the continual intrigues of those who wished to secure his co-operation, and every partisan sought by unscrupulous arts to prejudice the cause of his opponents. A single false step, a single inclination towards one or the other faction, would have ruined Byron's usefulness at the very outset. But he went to work like a wily strategist, and though without practical experience of politics, must have profited by his knowledge of history. Count Gamba thus describes his method, which carries an amusing reflection of his unfailing sense of humour. Sometimes that sense, in its irrepressible outbursts, cheapened his finer poetical efforts, but in politics it stood him in good stead, and served practical ends. "He occupied himself," says Count Gamba, "in discovering the truth, hidden as it was under these intrigues, and amused himself in confronting the agents of the different factions." The assumption of responsibility enabled Byron to break with long irregular habits, and to settle down to a simple and methodical way of life.

In human character, as in politics, no revolution is immediate or complete, and on at least two occasions the old Byron showed itself through the new. When

282

THE LAST ADVENTURE

he visited Ithaca during the long halt at Cephalonia, the former petulant attitude towards mere scholasticism reappeared. A proposal to show him the classical antiquities of the island aroused the old irascibility : he resented being taken for an archaeologist, and said to Trelawny : "Do I look like one of these emasculated fogeys ? Do people think I have no lucid intervals, that I came to Greece to scribble mere nonsense ? I will show them that I can do something better." At Vathi, the chief town of Ithaca, a departure from his usual abstemiousness at a public entertainment brought on a dreadful fit of stomachic cramp, and the pain seems, for a time, to have imperilled his reason. Before he had fully recovered, the too-elaborate ceremonial of his welcome at a monastery proved too much for him. The old fury awoke once more. Midway in the Abbot's obsequious address to the *Lor do Inglese*, Saviour of Greece, Byron broke into a torrent of Italian execrations, seized a torch, rushed from the hall and shut himself up in his room. At those who followed him there he hurled furniture and curses. It was the last recorded return of that blind frenzy which had torn down the grating from the Harrow windows. Next morning it was a mild and genial Byron who returned the salutations of his reverend hosts, to whose alms-box he made a "handsome donation.*' The unfortunate episode was passed over in silence by all parties. It was in the mood of Prospero that he left the monastery; and as he rode through the beautiful Ithacan scenery he exclaimed : "If this Isle

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

but have felt some return of his old romantic elation. He was no longer a tourist: he had landed as the acknowledged chief of the Greece he dreamed might still be free. Even if his thoughts flew back to Tepaleen and the op6ra~bouffe entourage of Ali Pacha, he felt that he had outgrown such theatricality. If he surrounded himself with a bodyguard of "dark Sulkies," that was for stern practical purposes; and his mood at the moment accorded so little with classical associations that he made haste to disillusion colleagues who came out from England "with their minds full of Plutarch's men." Throughout the letters that reflect his innumerable difficulties—the discords, the delay and failure of supplies, the flux of parties—there emerges one clear aim. To that end he strove, unsparing of himself, alert, wary, indefatigable.

The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. Byron was wearing himself out. His old morbid fear of becoming fat chained him to a more than Spartan diet, inadequate to support a man engaged in tasks so many and so heavy. His health declined rapidly, and there grew upon him the conviction that he would never return to England. This at length hardened to a certainty, but still he gave no outward sign of flagging.

His generosity and kindness of heart were proverbial. "He became universally popular and proportionally powerful." Of campaigning prospects he spoke hopefully, and indeed he believed that, whether he should live to see the attainment of the goal or no, affairs were

286

THE LAST ADVENTURE

shaping for success. The English loan was well in train; meanwhile, he himself would stand paymaster. He had already made large advances from his private purse, and had given instructions that the whole of his income for 1824 should be held in readiness to meet Greek expenditure. But Fate was stealing a march upon him.

Before he left Cephalonia he had been alarmed by the news that his daughter Ada was suffering from "a determination of blood to the head." He had told Dr. Kennedy, as a curious fact, that he himself was subject to the same complaint, and the physician replied that he would have inferred that to be the case, not only from Byron's habits of intense and irregular study, but also from the condition of his eyes. The incident was ominous. On 15th February he had a seizure, either epileptic or apoplectic, which passed quickly, but left him very weak. Then began that course of bad doctoring which robbed him of any chance he might have had of recovery. He took no care, and toiled on. Every physical condition was against him. Incessant rains rendered the malarial swamp of Missolonghi more than ever unhealthy. Of damp and drenchings the sick man took no heed. He put aside the advice of those who would have had him remove to less pestilential quarters : such action might seem like desertion of his post. Now, if ever, he must live up to the family motto : " Trust Byron." Therefore, no turning back.

Through those drizzling, comfortless days he moved, steadfast and unwavering—riding out when he could,

BYRON IN PERSPECTIVE

urging a filial scruple ---a promise to his mother that he would nev[^]r allow himself to be bled. Only a hint that, if he refused, he might go mad—an old terror with him, for he dreaded the fate of Swift—won him at length to hold out his arm to the lancet. "There you are," he cried, " a set of damned butchers : take away as much blood as you like and have done with it! " Further bleeding and blistering—the worst possible treatment—brought him to the point of exhaustion. Proper nursing he had none. He, whose life had been a perpetual reference to women, had no woman by him at the last pinch. Fletcher, his faithful valet, and Tita, his picturesque gondolier—last link, save Count Gamba, with Venice—did what they could, but their skill was small. Prostration increased. The watchers knew the end at hand.

He, too, knew it. There was no time to lose. He had urgent things to dictate, but speech w[^]As failing. What he would have set down was never formulated. His broken phrases showed that once more his thoughts w[^]ere in England—with his daughter Ada, with his sister Augusta, with Lady Byron. To his wife he tried in vain to send some message. Perchance his thought went even beyond these, to earlier times and other loves—to some fading vision of boyhood—that Speech Day at Harrow, when he had squired Augusta and charged her to come in the Carlisles' most dashing carriage to do him credit; perhaps he dreamed also of Mary Chaworth—of the north—of blue hills and clear streams—of Mary Duff. But no word of these passed his lips. His thoughts came back

290

THE LAST ADVENTURE

to Greece : " I have given her my time, my means, my health---and now I give her my life. What could I do more? Poor Greece, poor town, my poor servants! "

In his delirium he led the attack on Lepanto—or was it some blurred fantasy of Juan in the breach at Ismail ? " Forward, forward, follow my example, don't be afraid! " For death he did not care. In his indistinct mutterings some thought they caught the names of Hobhouse and Kinnaird.

At six o'clock on the evening of April 18 he seemed easier, and said, " Now I shall go to sleep." At once he fell into a coma that lasted until a quarter past six on the evening of the 19th, when his eyes opened for a moment and then closed for ever. As he passed, a heavy thunderstorm raged over Missolonghi. It was as if the elements would maintain the Napoleonic parallel. Byron, although he hated war, liked to think of himself in terms of Napoleon; but his dreams of future conquests for himself were all pacific. Let him but see Greece liberated, and he would throw away his sword. His last ambitions were of leadership in statecraft, beginning with the Ambassadorship of Free Greece to the United States. Trelawny's fantastic theory that the Congress of Salona was ready to offer the poet a crown would have seemed to Byron as serio-comic as his title of Archistrategos.

During those last months the poet slumbered, save for one flash, to which he was provoked by the remark of Colonel Stanhope that he no longer wrote poetry. He

APPENDIX: THE BYRON STATUES¹

SOON after the poet's death, on April 19, 1824, his friend, John Cam Hobhouse, afterwards Lord Broughton, instituted a scheme to erect a Byron Memorial in Westminster Abbey. Sir Walter Scott, who was on the original Committee, writing to Hobhouse about probable objections on the part of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, said that he hoped "the guardians of that asylum would not fix their attention on speculative errors or levities, but consider the quantity of genius of which Britain was prematurely deprived, and the real character of the individual, though it was not always that which was most ostensible." Sir Walter did not live to see the end of the matter, which was troublesome enough. The project was not well supported, and only £1000 was subscribed—not sufficient to tempt a British sculptor of the first rank. Chantrey, Gibson and Westmacott declined the commission, which was entrusted in 1829 to the Dane, Thorwaldsen, who had modelled a bust of Byron in 1816. In December 1834 the statue arrived, and the Committee—which

1 See Edgecumbe: "History of the Byron Memorial"; R. Sinker: "The Statue of Byron in the Library of Trinity College"; *N. and Q.*, Nov. 26, 1881; and "Byron, Newspaper Cuttings," B.M. 1764. a. 11. Text reprinted from *Aberdeen Press and Journal**
294

APPENDIX

included Isaac Disraeli, Sir Stratford Canning, Peel (then. Prime Minister), Goethe, Rogers, Campbell, Gifford, John Murray and Sir Martin Shee—applied through Murray to Dean Ireland for permission to erect the statue in the Abbey. It was refused, and the matter fell into abeyance, the statue remaining derelict at the London Customs House.

Lord Brougham (the savage reviewer of "Hours of Idleness ") characterised the refusal as " discreditable alike to our reason, our national taste, and our good sense." Bishop Blomfield, on the other side, argued that " if Lord Byron in his works attacked the Founder of our Religion, and, by the beauties of his verse was one of the most dangerous advisers of youth, his statue does not deserve a place in the Temple of our God." With Blomfield's remark it is illuminating to compare Byron's note to " Don Juan," Canto XV, stanza 18 : " I mean by ' Diviner still,' Christ. If ever God was man—or man God—he was *both*. I never arraigned His creed, but the use, or abuse—made of it."

On Dean Ireland's death the application was not renewed, as his successor was known to be of the same opinion. In 1844 Albany de Fonblanque reopened the question. Feeling—partly social, partly political—ran inordinately high, and the movement produced a crowd of satirical pamphlets. No progress was made, the project was dropped once more, and in 1855 Thorwaldsen's fine work still lay in the Customs House cellars. In that year, however^ the Committee offered it to Trinity

APPENDIX

College, Cambridge, and the Master—Whewell—accepted it gladly for Trinity Library, where it remains.

In 1875, on the fifty-first anniversary of Byron's death, a scheme was set afoot to place a slab over his grave in Hucknall Torkard Church. Disraeli, Tennyson, Lords Lovelace and Houghton, G. A. Sala and Wilkie Collins backed the movement and opened a public subscription. But Disraeli thought it did not go far enough; he was for a national memorial, and presided at a meeting held in Willis's Rooms on July 16th, 1875. Referring to probable objections, the Prime Minister said that "when half a century has elapsed private character is scarcely an element in the estimate of literary genius/" Almost with one voice the Press approved, but *The Rock* waxed virtuously indignant in a leading article (July 28, 1875) : "When two years ago, the death of Byron's wretched paramour, the Countess Guiccioli, was announced, we earnestly hoped—as we said at the time—that we had done with the noble poet. A career like his should be kept in all possible obscurity . . . The proposal to erect a national monument to Byron amounts almost to a national sin." The paper went on to scold the Prime Minister for "trying to scrub a blackamoor white," but, relenting a trifle, it had the grace to admit that "the novels in our circulating libraries contain much more perilous stuff than the reprehensible passages in Byron's works, and *these passages are but few.*"

The scheme did not split on *The Rock*. It went forward steadily under the guidance of committees in

APPENDIX

England, France, Italy and Greece. American support was also forthcoming. It is curious to note that Swinburne appears among the committee-men. Others were Alfred Austin, Locker, Stanhope, John Murray the Third, and Lords Rosslyn, Malmesbury, and Bradford.

Competitive designs were invited, without satisfactory result. A second competition ended in smoke and a makeshift choice of the design by R. C. Bolt, who tried to please the Committee and consequently produced a mediocre work. It represents the poet seated on a rock, looking out upon the sea. On his knee rests the MS. of "Childe Harold." There was trouble about a site. One was proposed in the Green Park, opposite Byron's former house, 13 Piccadilly Terrace; another at the top of St. James's Street. Neither could be secured, and at length Queen Victoria presented the site in Hamilton Gardens. Lord Houghton unveiled the statue on May 24, 1880. The red marble for the pedestal—the gift of Greece—not being to hand, the statue, when unveiled, rested on a wooden base, which remained for some time.

Feeling about Byron monuments is all kindly now. Dean Stanley said he would have received not only the statue, but the poet's dust, into the Abbey.

The latest of the Byron statues—that unveiled on September 14, 1928, at the Grammar School, Aberdeen—was the outcome of a scheme which, like all other projects of the kind, took long to mature. The idea was first mooted in 1898 by the late Dr. Morland Simpson, then Rector of the School. For various reasons, mostly

APPENDIX

unavoidable, little progress was made for many years; and during the war it fell, perforce, into abeyance. But the projectors never lost sight of their scheme; and after the peace it was taken up again, and furthered with an enthusiasm previously somewhat lacking. This is probably significant of the better appreciation of Byron in recent years.

The statue—a fine and poetical composition by Mr. J. Pittendrigh Macgillivray, R.S.A., LL.D., the King's Sculptor for Scotland—stands opposite the main entrance of the School : not the old building Byron knew, but its successor on a different site. By accident or design, the figure is so placed that the poet looks towards Lochnagar. The mountain is not visible from the school grounds; but if the line of sight were produced, it would not miss by much, if at all, the Deeside peak Byron loved and linked in song with Mount Ida-

