THE LOVE AFFAIRS OF LORD BYRON

BY FRANCIS GRIBBLE
AUTHOR OF "GEORGE SAND AND HER LOVERS" ETC.

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LONDON
EVELEIGH NASH
FAWSIDE HOUSE
1910

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Title: The Love Affairs of Lord Byron

Author: Francis Henry Gribble

Release date: December 24, 2012 [eBook #41701]
Most recently updated: October 23, 2024

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/41701

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THE LOVE AFFAIRS OF LORD BYRON

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MADAME DE STAËL AND HER LOVERS

GEORGE SAND AND HER LOVERS

ROSSEAU AND THE WOMEN HE LOVED

CHATEAUBRIAND AND HIS COURT OF WOMEN

THE PASSIONS OF THE FRENCH ROMANTICS



Lord Byron.

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OF LORD BYRON

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PREFACE

Whether a book is called “The Love Affairs of Lord Byron” or “The Life of Lord Byron” can make very little difference to the contents of its pages. Byron’s love affairs were the principal incidents of his life, and almost the only ones. Like Chateaubriand, he might have spoke of “a procession of women” as the great panoramic effect of his career. He differed from Chateaubriand, however, in the first place, in not professing to be very much concerned by the

pageant, and, in the second place, in being, in reality, very deeply affected by it. Chateaubriand kept his emotions well in hand, exaggerating them in retrospect for the sake of literary effect, picturing the sensibility of his heart in polished phrases, but never giving the impression of a man who has suffered through his passions, or been swept off his feet by them, or diverted by them from the pursuit of ambition or the serene cult of the all-important ego. In all Chateaubriand's love affairs, in short, red blood is lacking and self-consciousness prevails. He appears to be equally in love with all the women in the procession; the explanation being that he is more in love with himself than with any of them. In spite of the procession of women, which is admitted to have been magnificent, it may justly be said of Chateaubriand that love was "of his life a thing apart."

Of Byron, who coined the phrase (though Madame de Staël had coined it before him) it cannot be said. It may appear to be true of sundry of his incidental love affairs, but it cannot stand as a broad generalisation. His whole life was deflected from its course, and thrown out of gear: first, by his unhappy passion for Mary Chaworth; secondly, by the way in which women of all ranks, flattering his vanity for the gratification of their own, importuned him with the offer of their hearts. Lady Byron herself did so no less than Lady Caroline Lamb, and Jane Clairmont, and the Venetian light o' loves, though, no doubt, with more delicacy and a better show of maidenly reserve. Fully persuaded in her own mind that he had pined for her for two years, she delicately hinted to him that he need pine no longer. He took the hint and married her, with the catastrophic consequences which we know. Then other women—a long series of

other women—did what they could to break his fall and console him. He dallied with them for years, without ever engaging his heart very deeply, until at last he realised that this sort of dalliance was a very futile and enervating occupation, tore himself away from his last entanglement, and crossed the sea to strike a blow for freedom.

That is Byron's life in a nutshell. His biographer, it is clear, has no way of escape from his love affairs; while the critic is under an obligation, almost equally compelling, to take note of them. It is not merely that he was continually writing about them, and that the meaning of his enigmatic sentences can, in many cases, only be unravelled by the help of the clue which a knowledge of his love affairs provides. The striking change which we see the tone of his work undergoing as he grows older is the reflection of the history of his heart. Many of his later poems might have been written in mockery of the earlier ones. He had his illusions in his youth. In his middle-age, if he can be said to have reached middle-age, he had none, but wrote, to the distress of the Countess Guiccioli, as a man who delighted to tear aside, with a rude hand, the striped veil of sentiment and hypocrisy which hid the ugly nakedness of truth. The secret of that transformation is written in the record of his love affairs, and can be read nowhere else. His life lacks all unity and all consistency unless the first place in it is given to that record.

Since the appearance of Moore's Life, and even since the appearance of Cordy Jeaffreson's "Real Lord Byron," a good deal of new information has been made available. The biographer has to take cognisance of the various documents brought together in Mr. Murray's latest edition of Byron's

Writings and Letters; of Hobhouse's "Account of the Separation"; of the "Confessions," for whatever they may be worth, elicited from Jane Clairmont and first printed in the *Nineteenth Century*; of Mr. Richard Edgcumbe's "Byron: the Last Phase"; and of the late Lord Lovelace's privately printed work, "Astarte."

The importance of each of these authorities will appear when reference is made to it in the text. It will be seen, then, that some of the Murray MSS. give precision to the narrative of Byron's relations with Lady Caroline Lamb, and that others effectually dispose of Cordy Jeaffreson's theory that Lady Byron's mysterious grievance—the grievance which caused her lawyer to declare reconciliation impossible—was her husband's intimacy with Miss Clairmont. Others of them, again, as effectually confute Cordy Jeaffreson's amazing doctrine that Byron only brought railing accusations against his wife because he loved her, and that at the time when he denounced her as "the moral Clytemnestra of thy lord," he was in reality yearning to be recalled to the nuptial bed. Concerning "Astarte" some further remarks may be made.

It is a disgusting and calumnious compilation, designed, apparently, to show that Byron's descendants accept the worst charges preferred against him by his enemies during his lifetime. Those charges are such that one would have expected a member of the family to hold his tongue about them, even if he were in possession of evidence conclusively demonstrating their truth. That a member of the family should have revived the charges on the strength of evidence which may justly be described as not good enough to hang a dog on almost surpasses belief. Still, the thing has been

done, and the biographer's obligations are affected accordingly. Unpleasant though the subject is, he must examine the so-called evidence for fear lest he should be supposed to feel himself unable to rebut it; and he is under the stronger compulsion to do so because the mud thrown by Lord Lovelace is not thrown at Byron only, but also at Augusta Leigh, a most worthy and womanly woman, and the best of sisters and wives. It is the hope and belief of the present writer that he has succeeded in definitely clearing her character, together with that of her brother, and demonstrated that the legend of the crime, so industriously inculated by Byron's grandson, has no shadow of foundation in fact.

FRANCIS GRIBBLE

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CHAPTER I

ANCESTORS, PARENTS, AND HEREDITARY INFLUENCES

The Byrons came over with the Conqueror, helped him to conquer, and were rewarded with a grant of landed estates in Lancashire. Hundreds of years elapsed before they distinguished themselves either for good or evil, or emerged from the ruck of the landed gentry. There were Byrons at Crecy, and at the siege of Calais; and there probably were Byrons among the Crusaders. There is even a legend of a Byron Crusader rescuing a Christian maiden from the Saracens; but neither the maiden nor the Crusader can be identified. The authentic history of the family only begins with the grant of Newstead Abbey, at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, to Sir John Byron of Clayton, in Lancashire—a reward, apparently, for services rendered by his father at the Battle of Bosworth Field.

Even so, however, the Byrons remained comparatively inconspicuous[1]; and their records only begin to be full and interesting at the time of the war between Charles I. and his Parliament. Seven Byrons, all brothers, then fought on the King's side; and the most distinguished of the seven was the eldest, another Sir John Byron of Clayton—a loyal,

valiant, and impetuous soldier, with more zeal than discretion. It was his charge that broke Haslerig's cuirassiers at Roundway Down. It was in his regiment that Falkland was fighting when he fell at Newbury. On the other hand he helped to lose the battle of Marston Moor by charging without orders. "By Lord Byron's improper charge," Prince Rupert reported, "much harm hath been done."

He had been given his peerage—with limitations in default of issue male to his six surviving brothers and the issue male of their bodies—in the midst of the war. After Naseby, he went to Paris, and spent the rest of his life in exile. His first wife being dead, he married a second—a lady concerning whom there is a piquant note in Pepys' Diary. She was, Pepys tells us, one of Charles II.'s mistresses—his "seventeenth mistress aboard," who, as the diarist proceeds, "did not leave him till she got him to give her an order for £4000 worth of plate; but, by delays, thanks be to God! she died before she got it."

This first Lord Byron died childless, and the title passed to his brother Richard, who had also distinguished himself in the war on the King's side. He was one of the colonels whose gallantry at Edgehill the University of Oxford rewarded with honorary degrees; and he was Governor, successively, of Appleby and Newark. He tried to seduce his kinsman, Colonel Hutchinson, from his allegiance to the Parliament, but without avail. "Except," Colonel Hutchinson told him, "he found his own heart prone to such treachery, he might consider that there was, if nothing else, so much of a Byron's blood in him that he should very much scorn to betray or quit a trust he had undertaken."

The third Lord, Richard's son William, succeeded to the title in 1679. His marriage with Elizabeth, daughter of Viscount Chaworth, brings the name of the heroine of the poet's first and last love into the story; and he is also notable as the first Byron who had a taste, if not actually a turn, for literature. Thomas Shipman, the royalist singer whose songs indicate, according to Mr. Thomas Seccombe's criticism in the "Dictionary of National Biography," that "the severe morals of the Roundheads were even less to his taste than their politics," was his intimate friend; and Shipman's "Carolina" contains a set of verses from his pen:

> "*My whole ambition only does extend*
> *To gain the name of Shipman's faithful friend;*
> *And though I cannot amply speak your praise,*
> *I'll wear the myrtle, tho' you wear the bays.*"

That is a fair specimen of the third Lord Byron's poetical style; and it is clear that his descendant did not need to be a great poet in order to improve upon it. Of his son, the fourth Lord, who died in 1736, there is nothing to be said; but his grandson, the fifth Lord, lives in history and tradition as "the wicked Lord Byron." The report of his arraignment before his fellow peers on the charge of murdering his relative, Mr. William Chaworth, in 1765, may be read in the Nineteenth Volume of State Trials, though the most careful reading is likely to leave the rights of the case obscure.

The tragedy, whatever the rights of it, occurred after one of the weekly dinners of the Nottinghamshire County Club, at the Star and Garter Tavern in Pall Mall. The quarrel arose out of a heated discussion on the subject of preserving game—a topic which

country gentlemen are particularly liable to discuss with heat. Lord Byron is said to have advocated leniency, and Mr. Chaworth severity, towards poachers. The argument led to a wager; and the two men went upstairs together—apparently for the purpose of arranging the terms of the wager—and entered a room lighted only by a dull fire and a single candle. As soon as the door was closed, they drew their swords and fought, and Lord Byron ran Mr. Chaworth through the body.

Those are the only points on which all the depositions agree. Lord Byron said that Chaworth, who was the better swordsman of the two, challenged him to fight, and that the fight was conducted fairly. The case for the prosecution was that Chaworth did not mean to fight, and that Lord Byron attacked him unawares. Chaworth, though he lingered for some hours, and was questioned on the subject, said nothing to exonerate his assailant. That, broadly speaking, was the evidence on which the peers had to come to their decision; and they found Lord Byron not guilty of murder but guilty of manslaughter. Pleading his privilege as a peer, he was released on payment of the fees.

Society, however, inclined to the view that he had not fought fairly. Two years before he had been Master of the Stag-hounds. Now he was cut by the county, and relapsed into misanthropic debauchery. He quarrelled with his son, the Honorable William Byron, sometime M.P. for Morpeth, for contracting a marriage of which he disapproved. He drove his wife away from Newstead by his brutality, and consorted with a low-born “Lady Betty.” The stories of his shooting his coachman and trying to drown his wife were untrue, but his neighbours believed them, and

behaved accordingly; and an unpleasant picture of his retirement may be found in Horace Walpole's Letters.

> "The present Lord," Horace Walpole writes, "hath lost large sums, and paid part in old oaks; five thousand pounds worth have been cut down near the house. *En revanche*, he has built two baby forts to pay his country in castles for the damage done to the Navy, and planted a handful of Scotch firs that look like plough-boys dressed in old family liveries for a public day."

Playing at naval battles and bombardments, with toy ships, on the little lakes in his park, was, indeed, the favourite, if not the only, recreation of the wicked lord's old age. It is said that his chief purpose in cutting down the timber was to spite and embarrass his heirs; and he did, at any rate, involve his heir in a law suit almost as long as the famous case of Jarndyce *versus* Jarndyce by means of an improper sale of the Byron property at Rochdale.

His heir, however, was not to be either his son or his grandson. They both predeceased him—the latter dying in Corsica in 1794—and the title and estates passed to the issue of his brother John, known to the Navy List as Admiral Byron, and to the navy as "foul weather Jack."

The Admiral had been round the world with Anson, had been wrecked on the coast of Chili, and had published a narrative—"my granddad's narrative"—of his hardships and adventures. He had later been sent round the world on a voyage of discovery on his own account, but had discovered nothing in particular. Finally he had fought, not too

successfully, against d'Estaing in the West Indies, and had withdrawn to misanthropic isolation. His son, Captain Byron, of the Guards, known to his contemporaries as "Mad Jack Byron," was a handsome youth of worthless character, but very fascinating to women. His elopement, while still a minor, with the Marchioness of Carmarthen, was one of the sensational events of a London season.

Lady Carmarthen's husband having divorced her, Mad Jack married her in 1778. They lived together in Paris and at Chantilly—prosperously, for the bride had £4000 a year in her own right. A child was born—Augusta, who subsequently married Colonel Leigh; but, in 1784, his wife died, and Captain Byron, heavily in debt, was once more thrown on his own resources. He returned to England to look for an heiress, and he found one in the person of Miss Gordon of Gight, whom he met and married at Bath in 1786.

The fortune, when the landed estates had been realised, amounted to about £23,000; and Captain Byron's clamorous creditors took most of it. A considerable portion of what was left was quickly squandered in riotous living on the Continent. The ultimate income consisted of the interest (subject to an annuity to Mrs. Byron's grandmother) on the sum of £4200; and that lamentable financial position had already been reached when Captain and Mrs. Byron came back to England and took a furnished house in Holles Street, where George Noel Gordon, sixth Lord Byron, was born on January 22, 1788.

There we have, in brief outline, all that is essential of the little that is known of Byron's heredity. If it is not precisely common-place, it is at least

undistinguished. No one can ever have generalised from it and said that the Byrons were brilliant, or even—in spite of the third Lord's conscientious attempts at versification—that they were "literary." A far more likely generalisation would have been that the Byrons were mad.

They were not quite that, of course, though some of them were eccentric; and those who were eccentric had the courage of their eccentricity. But they were, at least so far as we know them, impetuous and reckless men—men who went through life in the spirit of a bull charging a gate, doing what they chose to do because they chose to do it, with a defiant air of "damn the consequences." We find that note alike in the first Lord's "improper charge" on Marston Moor, and the fifth Lord's improvised duel in the dark room of the Pall Mall tavern, and in Captain Byron's dashing elopement with a noble neighbour's wife. We shall catch it again, and more than once, in our survey of the career of the one Byron who has been famous; and we shall see how much his fame owed to his pride, his determined indifference, in spite of his prickly sensitiveness, to public opinion, and his clear-cut, haughty character.

Legh Richmond, the popular evangelical preacher, once said that, if Byron had been as bad a poet as he was a man, his poetry would have done but little harm, but that criticism is almost an inversion of the truth. Byron, in fact, imposed himself far less because his poetry was good than because his personality was strong. He never saw as far into the heart of things as Wordsworth. When he tried to do so, at Shelley's instigation, he only saw what Wordsworth had already shown; and there are many passages in his work which might fairly be described as being "like

Wordsworth only less so." None of his shorter pieces are fit to stand beside "The world is too much with us," and he never wrote a line so wonderfully inspired as Wordsworth's "still, sad music of humanity."

But he had one advantage over Wordsworth. He spoke out; he was not afraid of saying things. His genius had all the hard riding, neck-or-nothing temper of the earlier, undistinguished Byrons behind it. He was "dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,"—and he damned the consequences with the haphazard blasphemy of an aristocrat who feels sure of himself, and has no need to pick his words. He was quite ready to damn them in the presence of ladies, and in the face of kings; and he damned them as one having authority, and not as the democratic upstarts; so that the world listened attentively, wondering what he would say next, and even Shelley, observing how easily he compelled a hearing, was fully persuaded that Byron was a greater poet than himself.

That, in the main, it would seem, was how heredity affected him. The hereditary influences, however, were, in their turn modified by the strange circumstances of his upbringing; and it is time to glance at them, and see how far they help to account for the loneliness and aloofness of Byron's temperament, for the sensitiveness already referred to, and for the ultimate attitude known as the Byronic pose.

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOLDAYS AT ABERDEEN, DULWICH, AND HARROW

Captain and Mrs. Byron, finding themselves impoverished, left Holles Street, and retired to Aberdeen, to live on an income of £150 a year. Augusta having been taken off their hands by her grandmother, Lady Holderness, they were alone together, with the baby and the nurse, in cheap and gloomy lodgings; and they soon began to wrangle. It was the old story, no doubt, of poverty coming in at the door and love flying out of the window, leaving only incompatibility of temper behind.

The husband, though inclined to be amiable as long as things went well, was, in modern phrase, a "waster." The wife, though shrewd and possessed of some domestic virtues, was, in the language of all time, a scold. He wanted to run into debt in order to keep up appearances; she to disregard appearances in order to live within her income. Dinners of many courses and wines of approved vintages seemed to her the superfluities but to him the necessaries of life. He probably did not mince words in expressing his view of the matter; she certainly minced none in expressing hers. There is a strong presumption, too, that she complained of him to her neighbours; for it is well attested in her son's letters to his sister that she was that sort of woman. So the day came when Captain Byron walked out of the house, vowing that he would live with his wife no longer.

For a time he lived in a separate lodging in the same street. Presently, scraping some money together—borrowing it, that is to say, without any intention of repaying it—he went to France to amuse himself; and in January 1791, at the age of thirty-five, he died at Valenciennes. It has been suggested that he committed suicide, but nothing is known for certain. One of Byron's earliest recollections was of his mother's weeping at the news of her husband's death, and of his own astonishment at her tears. She had continually nagged at him, and heaped abuse on him, while he lived; yet now her distracted shrieks filled the house and disturbed the neighbourhood. That was the child's earliest lesson in the unaccountable ways of women. He was only three at the time—yet old enough to wonder, though not to understand.

His stay at Aberdeen was to last for seven more years. He was to go to school there, and to be accounted a dunce, though not a fool. He was to learn religion there from his nurse, who taught him the dark, alarming Calvinistic doctrine; and he was to develop some of the traits and characteristics which were afterwards to be pronounced. On the whole, indeed, in spite of alleviations, he had a gloomy childhood, by a sense, however imperfectly comprehended, of the contrast between life as it was and life as it ought to have been.

He had been born proud, inheriting quite as much pride from his mother's as from his father's family. He soon came to know that there were such things as old families, and that the Byron family was one of the oldest of them. It was borne in upon him by what he saw and heard that the proper place for a baron was a baronial hall; and he could see that the

apartment in which he was growing up was neither a hall nor baronial. The first apartment occupied by his mother was, in fact, as has already been said, a lodging, and the second was an “upper part,” the furniture of which, when it ultimately came to be sold, fetched exactly £74 17s. 7d.

The boy must have felt—we may depend upon it that his mother told him—that there was something wrong about that; that his school companions were make-shift associates, not really worthy of him; that he was, as it were, a child born in exile, and unjustly kept out of his rights. The feeling must have grown stronger—we may be quite sure that his mother stimulated it—when the unexpected death of his cousin made him the direct heir to the title and estates; and, indeed, it was a feeling to some extent justified by the facts. His great-uncle, the wicked Lord Byron, ought then, as everybody said, to have shown signs of recognition, and to have offered an allowance.

He made no sign, however, and he offered no allowance. Instead of doing so, he went on felling timber, and effected the illegal sale of the Rochdale property already referred too; and for four more years—from the age of six, roughly speaking, to the age of ten—the heir apparent to the barony was living poorly in an Aberdeen “upper part,” while the actual baron was living in luxury and state at Newstead. There were good grounds for bitterness and resentment there; and Mrs. Byron, with her unruly tongue, was the woman to make the most of them. Family pride grew apace under her influence; and there was no other influence to check or counteract it. The boy learnt to be as proud of his birth as a *parvenu* would like to be—a characteristic

of which we shall presently note some examples.

If he was proud, however, he was also sensitive: and it may well have been that his pride was, to some extent, a shield of protection which his sensitiveness threw up. He was sensitive, not only because he was poor when he ought to be rich and insignificant when he ought to be important, but also because he was lame. An injury done at birth to his Achilles tendons prevented him from planting his heels firmly on the ground. He had to trot on the ball of his foot instead of walking; he could not even trot for more than a mile or so at a time. A physical defect of that sort is always a haunting grief to a child—especially so, perhaps, to a child with a dawning consciousness of great mental gifts. It appears to such a child as an irreparable wrong done—a wrong which can never be either righted or avenged—an irremovable mark of inferiority, inviting taunts and gibes.

Byron was sensitive on the subject, fearing that it made him ridiculous, throughout his life, alike when he was the darling and when he was the outcast of society; and various stories show how the deformity embittered his childhood.

“What a pretty boy Byron is! What a pity he has such a leg!” he, one day, heard a lady say to his nurse.

“Dinna speak of it,” he screamed, stamping his foot, and slashing at her with his toy whip.

And then there is the story of his mother who, in one of her fits of passion, called him “a lame brat.”

He drew himself up, and, with a restraint and a concentrated scorn beyond his years, replied in the word which he afterwards put into “The

Hunchback":

"I was born so, mother."

That was one of the passionate scenes that passed between them—but only one among many; and it was only in the case of this one affront which cut him to the quick, that the child displayed such precocious self-control. More often he answered rage with rage and violence with violence. In one fit of fury he tore his new frock to shreds; in another he tried to stab himself, at table, with a dinner knife. Exactly why he did it, or what he resented, he probably did not know either at the time, or afterwards; but he vaguely felt, no doubt, that something was wrong with the world, and instinct impelled him to kick against the pricks and damn the whole nature of things.

Then, in 1798, came the sudden change of fortune. The wicked Lord Byron was dead at last; and the child of ten was a peer of the realm and the heir to great, though heavily mortgaged estates. He could not take possession of them yet—the embarrassed property needed to be delicately nursed—but still, subject to the charges, they were his. He was taken to look at them, and then, a tenant having been found for Newstead, Mrs. Byron settled, first at Nottingham, and then in London, and her son was sent to school—first to a preparatory school at Dulwich, and then to Harrow.

Even so, however, there remained something strange, abnormal, and uncomfortable about his position. On the one hand, Mrs. Byron, not understanding, or trying to understand, him, nagged and scolded until he lost almost all his natural affection for her. On the other hand, his father's relatives, whether because

they felt that “Mad Jack” had disgraced the family, or because they objected to Mrs. Byron—who, in truth, in spite of her good birth, was extremely provincial in her style, and of loquacious, mischief-making propensities—were very far from cordial. They had not even troubled to communicate with her when the death of her son’s cousin made him the direct heir, but had left her to learn the news accidentally from strangers. Lord Carlisle, the son of his grandfather’s sister, Isabella Byron, consented to act as his guardian, but abstained from making friendly overtures.

The fault in that case, however, was almost entirely Mrs. Byron’s. There was some dispute between her and Dr. Glennie, her son’s Dulwich headmaster—a dispute which culminated in a fit of hysterics in Dr. Glennie’s study. Lord Carlisle was appealed to, and the result of his attempt at mediation was that Mrs. Byron practically ordered him out of the house. Byron, of course, could not help that; but, equally of course, he suffered from it. He was neglected, and he was sensible of the neglect. He had come into a world in which he had every right to move, only to be made to feel that he was not wanted there. Born in exile, and having returned from exile, he was cold-shouldered by kinsmen who seemed to think that he would have done better to remain in exile.

Very likely he was, at that age, somewhat of a lout, shy, ill at ease, and unprepossessing. Genius does not necessarily reflect itself in polished behaviour. Aberdeen is not as good a school of manners as Eton, and Mrs. Byron was but an indifferent teacher of deportment. But his pride, it seems clear, was not the less but the greater because of his inability to express it in strict accordance with the rules of the best

society. He was a Byron—a peer of the realm—the senior representative of an ancient house. He knew that respect, and even homage, were due to him; and he felt that he must assert himself—if not in one way, then in another. So, when the Earl of Portsmouth—a peer of comparatively recent creation—presumed to give his ear a friendly pinch, he asserted himself by picking up a sea-shell and throwing it at the Earl of Portsmouth's head. That would teach the Earl, he said, not to take liberties with other members of the aristocracy.

At this date, too, when writing to his mother, he addressed her as "the Honorable Mrs. Byron," a designation to which, of course, she had no shadow of a right; and he earned the nickname of "the old English Baron" by his habit of boasting to his schoolfellows of the amazing antiquity of his lineage. Lord Carlisle may well have thought that it was high time for his ward to go to Harrow to be licked or kicked into shape. He went there in 1803, at the age of thirteen and a half.

Dr. Drury, of Harrow, was the first man who saw in Byron the promise of future distinction. "He has talents, my lord," he soon assured his guardian, "which will add lustre to his rank." Whereat Lord Carlisle merely shrugged his shoulders and said, "Indeed!"—whether because his ward's talents were a matter of indifference to him, or because he considered that rank could dispense with the lustre which talents bestow.

According to his own recollections, Byron was quick but indolent. He could run level in the class-room with Sir Robert Peel, who afterwards took a sensational double-first at Oxford, when he chose;

but, as a rule, he did not choose. He absorbed a good deal of scholarship, without ever becoming a good scholar in the technical sense, and his declamations on the speech-days were much applauded. There are records to the effect that he was bullied. A specially offensive insult directed at him in later life drew from him the retort that he had not passed through a public school without learning that he was deformed; and Leigh Hunt has related that sometimes "he would wake and find his leg in a tub of water." But he was not an easy boy to bully, for he was ready to fight on small provocation; and he won all his fights except one. He did credit to his religious training by punching Lord Calthorpe's head for calling him an atheist, though it is possible that his objections to the obnoxious epithet were as much social as theological, for an atheist, among schoolboys is, by implication, an "outsider."

"I was a most unpopular boy," he told Moore, "but *led* latterly." The latter statement has been generally accepted by his biographers; but not all the stories told in support of it stand the test of inquiry. There is the story, for instance, accepted even by Cordy Jeaffreson, that he led the revolt against Butler's appointment to the headmastership, but prevented his followers from burning down one of the class-rooms by reminding them that the names of their ancestors were carved upon the desks. "I can certify," wrote the late Dean Merivale of Ely, "that just such a story was told in my early days of Sir John Richardson;" so that Byron seems here to have got the credit for another hero's exploits.

There are the stories, too, of his connection with the first Eton and Harrow cricket match. Cordy Jeaffreson goes so far as to express doubt whether he

took part in the match at all; but that is exaggerated scepticism, which research would have confuted. The score is printed in Lillywhite's "Cricket Scores and Biographies of celebrated Cricketers;" and it appears therefrom that Byron scored seven runs in the first innings and two in the second, and also bowled one wicket; but even on that subject the Dean of Ely, who went to Harrow in 1818, has something to say.

> "It is clear," the Dean writes, "that he was never a leader.... On the contrary, awkward, sentimental, and addicted to dreaming and tombstones, he seems to have been held in little estimation among our spirited athletes. The remark was once made to me by Mr. John Arthur Lloyd (of Salop), a well-known Harrovian, who had been captain of the school in the year of the first match with Eton (1805): 'Yes,' he said, 'Byron played in the match, and very badly too. He should never have been in the eleven if my counsel had been taken.'"

And the Dean goes on, picturing Byron's awkwardness:

> "Mrs. Drury was once heard to say of him: 'There goes Byron' (Birron she called him) 'straggling up the hill, like a ship in a storm without rudder or compass.'"

Byron's influence at Harrow, in short, was exercised over his juniors rather than his contemporaries. It pleased him, when he was big enough, to protect small boys from school tyrants. One catches his feudal spirit again in his appeal to a bully not to lick Lord Delawarr "because he is a fellow peer"; but he was also ready to intervene in other cases in which

that plea could not be urged; and he had the reward that might be expected. He once offered to take a licking for one of the Peels; and he became a hero with hero-worshippers—titled hero-worshippers for the most part—sitting at his feet. Lord Delawarr, Lord Clare, the Duke of Dorset, the Honorable John Wingfield, were the most conspicuous among them. It was from their adulation that he got his first taste of the incense which was, in later years, to be burnt to him so lavishly.

He described his school friendships, when he looked back on them, as "passions"; and there is no denying that the language of the letters which he wrote to his friends was inordinately passionate for a schoolboy addressing schoolfellows. "Dearest" is a more frequent introduction to them than "dear," and the word "sweet" also occurs. It is not the happiest of signs to find a schoolboy writing such letters; and it is not altogether impossible that unfounded apprehensions caused by them account for the suggestion made by Drury—though the fact is not mentioned in the biographies—that Byron should be quietly removed from the school on the ground that his conduct was causing "much trouble and uneasiness."

That, however, is uncertain, and one must not insist. All that the so-called "passions"—occasionally detrimental though they may have been to school discipline—demonstrate is Byron's enjoyment of flattery, and his proneness to sentiment and gush. He liked, as he grew older, to accept flattery, while professing to be superior to it; to enjoy sentiment, and then to laugh at it; to gush with the most gushing, and then suddenly to turn round and "say 'damn' instead." But the cynicism which was

afterwards to alternate with the sentimentalism had not developed yet. He did not yet say “damn”—at all events in that connection.

One must think of him as a boy with a great capacity for passionate affection, and a precocious tendency to gush, deprived of the most natural outlets for his emotions. He could not love his mother because she was a virago; he hardly ever saw his sister; his guardian kept him coldly at a distance. Consequently his feelings, dammed in one direction, broke out with almost ludicrous intensity in another; and his friendships were sentimental to a degree unusual, though not, of course, unknown or unprecedented, among schoolboys. He wrote sentimental verses to his friends.

But not to them alone. “Hours of Idleness,” first published when he was a Cambridge undergraduate, is the idealised record of his school friendships; but it is also the idealised record of other, and very different, excursions into sentiment. It introduces us to Mary Duff, to Margaret Parker, to Mary Chaworth, —and also to some other Maries of less importance; and we will turn back and glance, in quick succession at their stories before following Byron to Cambridge.

CHAPTER III

A SCHOOLBOY'S LOVE AFFAIRS—MARY DUFF, MARGARET PARKER, AND MARY CHAWORTH

First on the list of early loves comes little Mary Duff of Aberdeen. She was one of Byron's Scotch cousins, though a very distant one; and there is hardly anything else to be said, except that he was a child and she was a child in their kingdom by the sea. Only no wind blew out of a cloud chilling her. Her mother made a second marriage—described by Byron as a "faux pas" because it was socially disadvantageous—and left the city; and the two children never met again.

It was of no importance, of course. They were only a little more than seven when they were separated. But Byron was proud of his precocity, and liked to recall it, and to wonder if any other lover had ever been equally precocious. "I have been thinking lately a good deal of Mary Duff," he wrote in a fragment of a diary at the age of twenty-five; and he reminded himself how he used to lie awake, picturing her, and how he urged his nurse to write her a love letter on his behalf, and how they sat together—"gravely making love in our way"—while Mary expressed pity for her younger sister Helen, for not having an admirer too. Above all, he reminded himself of the shock which he felt, years afterwards, when the sudden communication of a piece of news revived the recollection of the idyll.

> "My mother," he proceeded, "used always to rally me about this childish amour; and, at last, many years after, when I was sixteen, she told me, one day, 'Oh, Byron, I have had

> a letter from Edinburgh, from Miss Abercromby, and your old sweetheart Mary Duff is married to a Mr. C——.' And what was my answer? I really cannot explain or account for my feelings at that moment; but they nearly threw me into convulsions, and alarmed my mother so much that, after I grew better, she generally avoided the subject—to *me*—and contented herself with telling it to all her acquaintance."

And then again:

> "My misery, my love for that girl were so violent that I sometimes doubt if I have ever been really attached since. Be that as it may, hearing of her marriage several years after was like a thunder stroke—it nearly choked me—to the horror of my mother and the astonishment and almost incredulity of nearly everybody."

It is a well-known story, and one can add nothing to it beyond the fact that Mary Duff's husband was Mr. Cockburn, the wine merchant, and that she lived quite happily with him, and that we are entitled to think of her whenever we drink a glass of Cockburn's port. But we may also doubt, perhaps, whether Byron is, in this case, quite a faithful reporter of his own emotions, and whether his grief was not artistically blended with other and later regrets, and other and later perceptions of the fickleness of the female heart and the mutability of human things. For when we come to look at the dates, we find that the date of Mary Duff's marriage was also the date of Byron's desperate passion for Mary Chaworth.

Between Mary Duff and Mary Chaworth, however,

Margaret Parker had intervened. She was another cousin, descended from Admiral Byron's daughter Augusta. The first letter that Byron ever wrote was addressed to her mother. "Dear Madam," it began, "My Mamma being unable to write herself desires I will let you know that the potatoes are now ready and you are welcome to them whenever you please." For the rest, one can only quote Byron's brief reminiscence:

> "My first dash into poetry was as early as 1800. It was the ebullition of a passion for my first cousin Margaret Parker, one of the most beautiful of evanescent beings. I have long forgotten the verses, but it would be difficult for me to forget her—her dark eyes —her long eyelashes—her completely Greek cast of face and figure! I was then about twelve—she rather older, perhaps a year. She died about a year or two afterwards in consequence of a fall which injured her spine and induced consumption.... My sister told me that, when she went to see her, shortly before her death, upon accidentally mentioning my name, Margaret coloured through the paleness of mortality to the eyes.... I knew nothing of her illness, being at Harrow and in the country, till she was gone. Some years after I made an attempt at an elegy—a very dull one."

And then Byron speaks of his cousin's "transparent" beauty—"she looked as if she had been made out of a rainbow"—and concludes:

> "My passion had its usual effect upon me—I could not eat—I could not sleep—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 that 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."

The elegy is included in the collected works. Special indulgence is asked for it on the ground that it was "composed at the age of fourteen." It is very youthful in tone—quite on the conventional lines—as one would expect. A single quatrain may be given—not to be criticised, but merely to show that Byron, as a boy, was still looking at life pretty much as his pastors and masters told him to look at it:

> "*And shall presumptuous mortals Heaven arraign!*
> *And, madly, Godlike Providence accuse!*
> *Ah! no, far fly from me attempts so vain;—*
> *I'll ne'er submission to my God refuse.*"

We are still a long way here from the intense, the cynical, the defiant, or even the posturing Byron of later years. The gift of personal expression has not yet come to him; and he is still in literary fetters, weeping, on paper, according to the rules. Intensity and the personal note only begin with his sudden love for Mary Chaworth; cynicism and defiance only begin after that love affair has ended in failure.

Mary Chaworth was the heir of the Annesley property, adjoining Newstead, and she was the grand-niece of the Chaworth whom the wicked Lord Byron ran through the body in the upper chamber of the Pall Mall tavern; so that their marriage, if they could have been married, would, as Byron says, "have healed feuds in which blood had been shed by

our fathers." But Byron was not yet the Byron who had only to come, and to be seen, in order to conquer. He was a schoolboy of fifteen, which is an awkward age. He had achieved no triumphs in any field which could give him self-assurance. He was not yet a leader, even among his schoolfellows; and he was not only lame, but also fat. How shall a fat boy hope, whatever fires of genius burn within him, to enter the lists against his elders and bear away the belle from county balls? Byron, at any rate, failed signally in the attempt to do so.

Newstead having been let to Lord Grey de Ruthen, Mrs. Byron was, at the time, lodging at Nottingham; and Byron had various reasons for preferring to see as little of her as possible. She was never sympathetic; she was often quarrelsome; it was her pleasant habit, when annoyed, to rattle the fire-irons and throw the tongs at him. So he often availed himself of his tenant's invitation to visit Newstead, whenever he liked; and from Newstead it was the most natural thing in the world that he should go over to Annesley, where Miss Chaworth, with whom he already had a slight acquaintance, was living with her mother, Mrs. Clarke.

He was always welcome there. There was as little desire on his cousin's side as on his to revive the recollection of the feud. When he came to call, he was pressed to stay and sleep. At first he refused, most probably from shyness, though he professed a superstitious fear of the family portraits. They had "taken a grudge to him," he said, on account of the duel; they would "come down from their frames at night to haunt him." But presently his fears, or his shyness, were conquered. He had seen a ghost, he said, in the park; and if he must see ghosts he might

just as well see them in the house; so, if it was all the same to his hosts, he would like to stay.

He stayed, and was entranced with Mary Chaworth's singing. He rode with her, and practiced pistol shooting on the terrace—more than a little pleased, one conjectures, to show off his marksmanship. He went with her—and with others, including a chaperon—on an excursion to Matlock and Castleton. A note, written long afterwards, preserves a memory of the trip:

> "It happened that, in a cavern in Derbyshire, I had to cross in a boat (in which two people only could lie down) a stream which flows under a rock, with the rock so close upon the water as to admit the boat only to be pushed on by a ferryman (a sort of Charon) who wades at the stern, stooping all the time. The companion of my transit was M.A.C., with whom I had long been in love, and never *told* it, though *she* had discovered it without. I recollect my sensations, but cannot describe them, and it is as well."

And no doubt Mary Chaworth encouraged the boy, amused at his raptures, enjoying the visible proof of her power, prepared to snub him, in the end, if necessary, but scarcely expecting that there would be any need for her to do so. She was seventeen, and a girl of seventeen always feels capable of reminding a boy of fifteen that the prayer book forbids him to marry his grandmother. Moreover, she was engaged, though the engagement had not yet been announced, to Mr. John Musters—a grown man and a Philistine—a handsome, rather dissipated, hard-riding and hard-drinking country squire. The dreamy, limping,

fat boy from Harrow had no shadow of a chance against his athletic rival. It was impossible for Mary Chaworth to divine the genius that lurked beneath the fat. One has no right to expect such powers of divination from girls of seventeen.

No doubt she thought the fat boy, as she would have said, “good fun.” No doubt she was amused when, as a demonstration that he was not too young to be loved, he showed her the locket which Margaret Parker had given him, three years before, when he was twelve. Unquestionably she flirted with him—or, at least, let him flirt with her. She even gave him a ring, and the gift must have raised high hopes, though it was the cause of the discovery which brought the flirtation to an end.

Squire Musters discovered the ring among Byron’s clothes one day when he and the boy were bathing together in the Trent. He recognised it, picked it up, and put it in his pocket. Byron claimed it, and Musters declined to give it up; and then, to quote the Countess Guiccioli, who is the authority for the story:

> “High words were exchanged. On returning to the house, Musters jumped on a horse and galloped off to ask an explanation from Miss Chaworth, who, being forced to confess that Lord Byron wore the ring with her consent, felt obliged to make amends to Musters by promising to declare immediately her engagement with him.”

Such is the story, as one gets it, through the Countess and through Moore, from Byron himself; but we also get a side glimpse at it in a letter, recently published, [2] from Mrs. Byron to Hanson, the family solicitor. From this we gather that Byron, in order to make

love, had absented himself from school; that Drury had inquired the reason of his absence; and that his mother was making strenuous, but unavailing, efforts to induce him to return. Nothing was the matter with him but love—"desperate love, the *worst* of all *maladies* in my opinion." He had hardly been to see his mother at all, but had been spending all his time at Annesley. "It is the last of all connexions," she added, "that I should wish to take place"; and she begged Mr. Hanson to make arrangements for her son to spend his next holidays elsewhere. Expense was no object; and it would suit her very well if Dr. Drury could be induced to detain him at Harrow.

And Byron himself, meanwhile, was writing to his mother, alternately using lofty language about his right to choose his own friends, and pleading for one more day in order that he might take leave.

He took it; but there is more than one version of the story.

"Do you think," he overheard Mary Chaworth say to her maid, "that I could care anything for that lame boy?" And, having heard that, "he instantly darted out of the house, and, scarcely knowing whither he ran, never stopped till he found himself at Newstead." That is what Moore tells us; but the picture drawn in "The Dream,"—the most obviously and deliberately autobiographical of Byron's poems —is different.

"She loved," he writes:

> "*Another: even now she loved another,*
> *And on the summit of that hill she stood*
> *Looking afar as if her lover's steed*
> *Kept pace with her expectancy, and flew.*"

She was waiting, that is to say, for Squire Musters to ride up the lane, while listening to Byron's declaration. That is the first picture; and then there follows the picture of the boy who "within an antique oratory stood," and to whom, presently, "the lady of his love re-entered":

> "*She was serene and smiling then, and yet*
> *She knew she was by him beloved—she knew,*
> *For quickly comes such knowledge, that his heart*
> *Was darkened with her shadow, and she saw*
> *That he was wretched, but she saw not all.*
> *He rose, and with a cold and gentle grasp*
> *He took her hand; a moment o'er his face*
> *A tablet of unutterable thoughts*
> *Was traced, and then it faded, as it came;*
> *He dropped the hand he held, and with slow steps*
> *Retired, but not as bidding her adieu,*
> *For they did part with mutual smiles; he passed*
> *From out the massy gate of that old Hall,*
> *And mounting on his steed he went his way;*
> *And ne'er repassed that hoary threshold more.*"

There we have the Mary Chaworth legend as it has been handed down from one generation of biographers to another. Byron, according to that legend, saw Mary once after her marriage, but once only. He was on the point of visiting her at a later date, but was dissuaded by his sister. "If you go," Augusta said, "you will fall in love again, and then there will be a scene; one step will lead to another, *et cela fera un éclat*." He agreed that the reasoning was sound, and did as he was advised. He tells that story himself, and adds: "Shortly after, I married."

And yet—the legend continues—this hopeless love, which touched his heart at the age of fifteen, was the dominating influence of his life. Mary Chaworth, though always absent, was yet always present. He never loved any other woman, though he tried to love, and indeed seemed to love, several. The vision of her face always came between him and them. His later love affairs were only concessions, or attempts to escape from himself and his memories—unavailing attempts, for this memory continued to haunt him until the end.

It sounds incredible. The thoughts of youth may be long, long thoughts; but the memories of youth are short, and the dreams of youth are dreams from which we never fail to wake. And yet Byron insists, quite as much as biographers have insisted. He insists in "The Dream," which was written more than a decade after the parting. He insists in later poems, the inner meaning of which is hardly to be questioned. So that speculation is challenged, and, when pursued, leads us inevitably to a dilemma.

For of two things, one: Either Byron was posing—posing not only to the world but to himself; or else the story, as all the biographers from Moore to Cordy Jeaffreson have told it, is incomplete, and after an interlude, had a sequel.

To search for such a sequel will be our task presently. Unless we can find one, the development of the personal note in Byron's work will have to be left unexplained. The impression which we get, if we read the more personal poems in quick succession, is of a man who first awakes from the dream of love—and remains very wide awake for a season—and then relapses and dreams it all over again. Unless the

story which first set him dreaming had had a sequel, that would hardly be. So we will seek for the sequel in due course, though we must first gather up the incidents of the interlude.

CHAPTER IV

LIFE AT CAMBRIDGE AND FLIRTATIONS AT SOUTHWELL

Baffled in love, Byron returned to Harrow, after a term's absence, in January 1804, and remained there for another eighteen months. This eighteen months is the period during which he describes himself as having been happy at school. It is also the period during which he haunted the Harrow churchyard, indulging his day dreams as he looked down from the hillside on the wide, green valley of the Thames. Those dreams, it is hardly to be doubted, were chiefly of Mary Chaworth; and we may picture the poet's secret sorrow as giving him, fat though he was, a sense of superiority over other boys who had no secret sorrows. Apparently, too, casting about for an explanation of his failure, he realised that, in the rivalries of love, the victory is far less likely to rest with the fat than with the lame; and so, presently,—though not until after an interval of reflection—he

set himself the task of compelling his too solid flesh to melt.

He has been laughed at, and charged with vanity for doing so; but he was right. He would also have been ridiculed, and with more justice, if he had resigned himself to be overwhelmed by the rising tide of superabundant tissue. Fatness is not merely a grotesque condition. It is a condition incompatible with fitness; and it is far nobler to resist it with systematic heroism than to cultivate it and call heaven and earth to witness that one is the fattest person going; and the fact that Byron, by dint of exercises which made him perspire, a careful diet, and a persistent use of Epsom salts, reduced his weight from fourteen stone six to twelve stone seven, is no small achievement to be passed over lightly. It is, on the contrary, one of the most memorable incidents in his development—the greatest of all the feats performed by him at Trinity College, Cambridge,[3] where he began to reside in October 1805.

He did not read for honours. At Oxford he might have done so, and might have figured in the same class list as his Harrow friend, Sir Robert Peel, who took a double-first, and Archbishop Whately, who took a double-second. At Cambridge, however, the pernicious rule prevailed that honours were only for mathematicians. The Classical Tripos was not originated until a good many years afterwards, and Byron had neither talent nor taste for figures. The most notable, though not the highest, wranglers of his year were Adam Sedgwick, the geologist, and Blomfield, Bishop of London. Byron would have had to work very hard to make any show against them. He did not enter the competition, but let his mind

exercise itself on more congenial themes, cherishing the belief—so erroneous and yet so common—that Senior Wranglers never come to any good in after life.

His allowance was £500 a year; and he kept a servant and a horse. His general proceedings, except when he was writing verses were pretty similar to those of the average young nobleman who attends a University, not to instruct but to amuse himself. He rode, and fenced, and boxed, and swam, and dived; he gambled and backed horses; he was alternately guest and host at rather uproarious wine-parties, and was spoken of as a young man "of very tumultuous passions." The statement has been made—he has made it himself and his biographers have repeated it—that he lived quietly at first, and only latterly got into a dissipated set; but as we find him, in his second term, entreating his sister to back a bill for £800, the statement probably needs to be modified in order to square with the facts.

Apparently Augusta did not comply with his request; but the proofs that he lived beyond his means are ample. Mrs. Byron was as loud in her wail on the subject as the widows of Asher. She complains—this also in the second term—of bills "coming in thick upon me to double the amount I expected"; and she protests, in Byron's first Easter vacation, against his wanton extravagance in subscribing thirty guineas to Pitt's statue; while, in the course of the next Easter vacation we find her consulting the family solicitor as to the propriety of borrowing £1000 to get her son out of the hands of the Jews, and declaring that, during the whole of his Cambridge career he has done "nothing but drink, gamble, and spend money."

Very similar is the testimony of his own and his sister's letters. "I was much surprised," Augusta writes, in the second term, to the solicitor, "to see my brother a week ago at the Play, as I think he ought to be employing his time more profitably at Cambridge." Byron himself, writing to his intimates, confesses to several departures from sobriety. The first was in celebration of the Eton and Harrow match, which was followed by a convivial scene, foreshadowing those at the Empire on boat-race night, at some place of public entertainment. "How I got home after the play," Byron says, "God knows. I hardly recollect, as my brain was so much confused by the heat, the row, and the wine I drank, that I could not remember in the morning how I found my way to bed." Later, in a letter to Miss Elizabeth Bridget Pigot of Southwell, he speaks of his life as "one continual routine of dissipation," talks of "a bottle of claret in my head," and concludes with the specific admission: "Sorry to say been drunk every day, and not quite sober yet."

Possibly he exaggerates a little; but those who know the Universities best will be least likely to suspect him of exaggerating very much. There is always a set which lives in that style at any college frequented by young men of ample means. Their ways, *mutatis mutandis*, are faithfully described in the pages of "Verdant Green." Byron's career, once more *mutatis mutandis*, was not unlike the career of Charles Larkyns and Little Mr. Bouncer in Cuthbert Bede's picture of life at the sister University. He had, at any rate, one foot in such a set as that, though he was in a better set as well, and formed serious friendships with such men as Hobhouse, afterwards Lord Broughton, Charles Skinner Matthews, afterwards Fellow of Downing, Scrope Davies, afterwards Fellow

of King's, and Francis Hodgson, ultimately Provost of Eton. It is not quite clear whether he was, or was not, one of the rowdy spirits who "ragged" Lort Mansell, the Master of Trinity.[4] He certainly annoyed the dons by keeping a bear as a pet, and asserting that he intended the animal to "sit for a fellowship." But the most characteristic picture, after all, is that which he draws (selecting his solicitor, of all persons in the world, for his confidant) of his mode of reducing his flesh.

> "I wear *seven* waistcoats, and a great Coat, run and play cricket in this Dress, till quite exhausted by excessive perspiration, use the bath daily, eat only a quarter of a pound of Butcher's Meat in 24 hours.... By these means my ribs display Skin of no great Thickness, and my clothes have been taken in nearly *half a yard*."

That is the closing passage of a letter which begins with the confession that "*Wine* and *women* have *dished* your *humble servant*." The two statements, taken in conjunction, furnish two-thirds of the picture. The remaining third of it may be deduced and constructed from the verses which Byron had then written or was then writing.

It might be tempting to see in the period of dissipation a disappointed lover's desperate attempt to escape from an ineffaceable recollection; and the view might be supported by Byron's own subsequent declaration that "a violent, though *pure*, love and passion," was "the then romance of the most romantic period of my life." Undergraduate excesses, however, rarely require such recondite explanations; and Byron's reminiscences had, as we shall see, been

coloured by intervening events. All the contemporary evidence that one can gather goes to show that they were inexact; that, though he had been hard hit by Mary Chaworth's disdainful reception of his suit, he did not mope, but, holding up his head, was in a fair way to live his trouble down; and that his theory of himself, put forward in the well-known lines in "Childe Harold":

> "*And I must from this land begone*
> *Because I cannot love but one*"

is an after thought entirely inconsistent with his practices as a Cambridge undergraduate.

One would be constrained to suspect that, even if the early poems addressed to Mary Chaworth stood alone. There are not many of them, and they lack the intensity of passion—the impression of all possible hopes irremediably blighted—which "The Dream" reveals. They strike one as a little stiff and artificial, as though the poet had tried to express, not so much what he actually felt, as what he considered that a man in his position ought to feel. That is particularly the case with the poems of the first period. There are boasts in them which we know to have been quite unwarranted by the circumstances of the case. The poet pictures himself as one who might disturb domestic peace if he chose, but refrains, being merciful as he is strong:

> "*Perhaps his peace I could destroy,*
> *And spoil the blisses that await him;*
> *Yet let my rival smile in joy,*
> *For thy dear sake, I cannot hate him.*"

The boasts there, we see, are the prelude of resignation; and, a line or two further on, resignation

is followed by the resolution to forget:

> "*Then, fare thee well, deceitful Maid,*
> *'Twere vain and fruitless to regret thee;*
> *Nor Hope nor Memory yield their aid,*
> *But Pride may teach me to forget thee.*"

That is very conventional—hardly less conventional than the Elegy on Margaret Parker—a sentimental "prelude to life," one would judge, of quite an ordinary kind. And, as has been said, the sentimental utterance does not stand alone. Other verses, hardly less sentimental, addressed to several other ladies, were, at the same time, pouring from Byron's pen.

Burgage Manor, a house which his mother had taken at Southwell, near Nottingham, was his vacation home. He fled from his home, from time to time, because of Mrs. Byron's incurable habit of rattling the fire-irons in order to draw attention to his faults; but he returned at intervals, and stayed long enough to form a considerable circle of friends—friends, be it noted, who belonged not to "the county" but to the professional society of the town.

The county did not "call" to any appreciable extent. A few of the men called on Byron himself; but none of the women called on Mrs. Byron—whether because her reputation for rattling the fire-irons and hurling the tongs had reached them, or because, on general principles, they did not think her good enough to mix with them. Byron, as was natural, resented their attitude and refused to return visits which implied a slight upon his mother. Whatever his own disputes with her, he would not have her snubbed by the local magnates, or himself enter their doors on sufferance while she was excluded from them. He mixed instead with the clergy, the doctors,

the lawyers, the retired colonels, and flirted with their sisters and daughters. In that set he moved as a triton among the minnows, fluttering the dovecotes of Southwell pretty much as, at a later date, Praed, fresh from Eton, fluttered the dovecotes of Teignmouth. He could not dance, of course, owing to his lameness; but he could distinguish himself in amateur theatricals, and he could write verses.

His success in the Southwell drawing-rooms and boudoirs was the first reward of his success in resisting and repelling the encroachments of the flesh. The struggle was one which he had to renew at intervals throughout his life; but his "crowning mercy" was the victory of this date. He emerged from it slim, elegant, and strikingly handsome. He rejoiced, and the girls of Southwell rejoiced with him. They understood, as well as he did, that it is difficult for a man to be fat and sentimental at one and the same time; that there is something ludicrously incongruous in the picture of a fat boy writing sentimental verses and professing to pine away for love. And they liked him to write sentimental verses to them, and he was quite willing to do so. He was, at this time, the sort of young man who will write verses to any girl who will give him a keepsake—the sort of young man to whom almost every girl will give a keepsake on condition that he will write verses to her.

He wrote lines, for instance, "to a lady who presented to the author a lock of hair braided with his own and appointed a night in December to meet him in the garden." Nothing is known of her except that her name was Mary, and that she was neither Mary Duff nor Mary Chaworth, but a third Mary "of humble station." Southwell, when it saw those

verses, was shocked. It seemed highly improper to Southwell that maidens of humble station should be encouraged to presume by such attentions on the part of noblemen. Probably it was on this occasion that the Reverend John Becher, Vicar of Rumpton, Notts, expostulated with the poet for

> "*Deigning to varnish scenes that shun the day*
> *With guilty lustre and with amorous lay.*"

But Byron kept Mary's lock of hair, and showed it, together with her portrait, to his friends and wrote:

> "*Thro' hours, thro' years, thro' time 'twill cheer —*
> *My hope in gloomy moments raise;*
> *In life's last conflict 'twill appear,*
> *And meet my fond, expiring gaze.*"

To Mary Chaworth herself Byron could hardly have said more, but he was, in fact, at this time, saying the same sort of thing to all and sundry. Just the same sentiment recurs in the lines addressed "To a lady who presented the author with the velvet band which bound her tresses":

> "*Oh! I will wear it next my heart;*
> *'Twill bind my soul in bonds to thee:*
> *From me again 'twill ne'er depart,*
> *But mingle in the grave with me.*"

Yet if Byron proposes to be faithful for ever to this un-named lady, he proposes, at the same time, to be equally faithful to a lady who can be identified as Miss Anne Houson:

> "*With beauty like yours, oh, how vain the contention!*
> *Thus lowly I sue for forgiveness before you;—*

At once to conclude such a fruitless dissension,
Be false, my sweet Anne, when I cease to adore you!"

And then there are other lines—innumerable other lines which would also have to be quoted if the treatment of the subject were to be encyclopædic—lines to Marion, lines to Caroline, lines to a beautiful Quaker, lines to Miss Julia Leacroft, whose brother, the fire-eating Captain John Leacroft remonstrated with Byron, and, according to Moore, even went so far as to challenge him, on account of his pointed attentions to his sister: lines, finally, to M.S.G. who would appear, if verse could be accepted as autobiography, to have offered to yield to Byron, but to have been spared because of his tender regard for her fair fame:

"*I will not ease my tortured heart,*
By driving dove-ey'd peace from thine;
Rather than such a sting impart,
Each thought presumptuous I resign.

"*At least from guilt shalt thou be free,*
No matron shall thy shame reprove;
Though cureless pangs may prey on me,
No martyr shalt thou be to love."

With that citation we may quit the subject. Not one of the sets of verses—with the single exception of the set addressed to Miss Leacroft—has any discoverable story attached to it. All of them—or nearly all of them—have the air of celebrating some profound attachment from which no escape is to be looked for on this side of the grave. Byron's later conception of himself as a man who had loved but one had not crept into his poetry yet. He had not even begun to

strike the pose of the Childe impelled to "visit scorching climes beyond the sea" because the one he loved "could ne'er be his."

The idea, indeed, of a man fleeing the country in 1809 because he had loved in vain in 1804 would not, in any case, carry conviction. Even to a poet the idea could hardly have presented itself without some definite renewal of the memories. They were revived, in fact, at a dinner party, in 1808, of which we find an account in one of Byron's letters to Hodgson:

> "I was seated near a woman to whom, when a boy, I was as much attached as boys generally are, and more than a man should be. I knew this before I went, and was determined to be valiant and converse with *sang froid*; but instead I forgot my valour and my nonchalance, and never opened my lips even to laugh, far less to speak, and the lady was almost as absurd as myself, which made both the object of more observation than if we had conducted ourselves with easy indifference. You will think all this great nonsense; if you had seen it, you would have thought it still more ridiculous. What fools we are! We cry for a plaything which, like children, we are never satisfied with till we break open, though, like them, we cannot get rid of it by putting it on the fire."

That is the prose record of the meeting, and there is also a record in verse. There are lines "to a lady on being asked my reason for quitting England in the Spring"; there is the piece beginning, "Well! thou art happy":

> "*Mary, adieu! I must away:*

While thou art blest I'll not repine;
But near thee I can never stay;
My heart would soon again be thine."

And also:

"*In flight I shall be surely wise,*
Escaping from temptation's snare;
I cannot view my Paradise
Without the wish of dwelling there."

Poor stuff, as poetry, it will be agreed. Any one who wrote poetry at all might have written it. The sentiment rendered in it is just the sentiment which any sentimental youth would have felt to be proper to the occasion. We can find in it, at most, only the faint fore-running shadow of the Byronic pose. It rings very insincerely if we set it beside the lines in which Walter Savage Landor, at about the same period, commemorated a similar moment of emotion:

"*Rose Aylmer, whom these waking eyes*
May weep but never see;
A night of memories and of sighs
I consecrate to thee."

In that comparison, most decidedly, all the advantage is with Landor—inevitably, because his were the feelings of a man, whereas Byron's were the feelings of a boy. He was only twenty, and his age is the explanation of a good deal. It explains his startled timidity, described in the letter to Hodgson, in a novel, romantic situation. It explains his hugging his grief as a precious possession on no account to be let go. It also explains the zest with which, when grief had had its sacred hour, he could turn from it and throw himself into other activities.

He rejoiced in the pose, only outlined as yet, which was presently to make him the most interesting man (to women at all events) in Europe; but he also rejoiced in his youth. He flirted, as we have seen; he took part in amateur theatrical performances; he engaged energetically in most of the sports of the day, fencing with Angelo, boxing with Gentleman Jackson, swimming the Thames from Lambeth to the Tower; he accumulated debts with the fine air of a man heaping Pelion on Ossa; he flung down his defiant challenge to the literary bigwigs in "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers"; he drew his plans for the grand tour. The world, in short, was just then "so full of a number of things" that Mary Chaworth's importance in it can easily be, as it has often been, exaggerated.

Presently we shall see Byron exaggerating it; and we shall also see how he came to do so—how the boy's occasional pose became the determining reality of the man's life. But before we come to that, we must turn back.

CHAPTER V

REVELRY AT NEWSTEAD—"ENGLISH BARDS AND SCOTCH REVIEWERS"

One watches the swelling of Byron's indebtedness with morbid interest. It is like the rapid rising of a Spring tide which threatens to submerge a city. Already, in his second term at Cambridge, as we have seen, he besought his sister to pledge her credit for his loans. At the beginning of his third year, we find him making a confession to his solicitor:

> "My debts amount to three thousand, three hundred to Jews, eight hundred to Mrs. B. of Nottingham, to coachmaker and other tradesmen a thousand more, and these must be much increased before they are lessened."

They were increased before they were lessened—unless the explanation be that Byron only told the truth about them in instalments. Three months later this is his confession to the Reverend John Becher:

> "*Entre nous*, I am cursedly dipped; my debts, *everything* inclusive, will be nine or ten thousand before I am twenty-one."

But, even so, the high-water mark is not yet reached. Towards the end of the same year, when Byron is contemplating his "grand tour," he once more calls his solicitor into council:

> "You honour my debts; they amount to perhaps twelve thousand pounds, and I shall require perhaps three or four thousand at setting out, with credit on a Bengal agent. This you must manage for me."

A pleasant commission, which seems to have led to a reference to Mrs. Byron, who made a luminous suggestion:

> "I wish to God he would exert himself and

> retrieve his affairs. He must marry a woman of *fortune* this Spring; love matches is all nonsense. Let him make use of the Talents God has given him. He is an English Peer, and has all the privileges of that situation."

It was a matter-of-fact proposal, worthy of the canny Scotswoman who made it—a proof that, even when she threw the tongs at her son, she still had his interests at heart; but nothing came of it. Very likely Byron, at this date knew no heiresses; and even his mother was not matter-of-fact enough to expect him to advertise for one, even for the purpose of avoiding the necessity of selling Newstead. There was still the resource of borrowing a little more, and of making the loans go as far as possible by retaining the money for personal expenses, instead of applying it to the payment of debt; and something of that sort seems to have been done. Scrope Davies lent Byron £4800; and yet Mrs. Byron had occasion to write:

> "There is some Trades People at Nottingham that will be completely ruined if he does not pay them, which I would not have happen for a whole world."

Moreover, though Byron himself talked vaguely to Hanson of the possibility of his marriage with "a golden Dolly," he was at an age at which a young man does not readily marry any woman with whom he is not in love. Whether he was or was not, at that time, in love with Mrs. Chaworth,[5] he certainly was not in love with any one else; and he was enjoying himself and "having his fling," after the manner of gilded youth. His "domestic female companion," to use Gibbon's charming phrase, was a professional daughter of joy who travelled about with him in

male attire. He even brought her to Newstead, when he took possession of the Abbey on the expiration of Lord Grey de Ruthen's tenancy. That may have been one reason—though it need not necessarily have been the only one—for his refusal to let his mother join him there. It would certainly have been a valid reason for postponing matrimony.

Around those Newstead revels a good deal of fantastic legend circles; and the facts concerning them are hardly to be disentangled from the myths. "Childe Harold" starts with them:—

> *Ah! me! in sooth he was a shameless wight,*
> *Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;*
> *Few earthly things found favour in his sight*
> *Save concubines and carnal companie,*
> *And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree.*

"Childe Harold," however, in spite of the fact that it was first called "Childe Buron," is a poem, not a deposition. The picture, with its "Paphian girls" and the rest of it—

> *Where superstition once had made her den,*
> *Now Paphian girls were wont to sing and smile,*
> *And monks might deem their time was come agen,*
> *If ancient tales say true, nor wrong these holy men,*

is not necessarily faithful because the note of contrast which it sounds is of the essence of the poem. But, on the other hand, the excuses and explanations by means of which Moore and Cordy Jeaffreson attempt to palliate and minimise the supposed assertions of the poem are somewhat less

than convincing.

The revels, say these apologists, cannot have been so very dreadful because the Newstead guests sometimes included some of the local clergy, and because some of the young men who engaged in them afterwards took orders. The obvious answer to that is that the revellers may very well have moderated their revelry on the occasions on which clergymen were present—and that those of them who afterwards became pillars of the Church may not, at that date, have got the old Adam into complete subjection. Nor is a great deal gained by the contention that the part of the supposed "Paphian girls" was, in fact, sustained by Byron's "domestic female companion," and by the Newstead cook and the Newstead housemaid. To say this is merely to protest that the alleged Paphians did not really come from Paphos, but from some other island in the same neighbourhood.

A letter written by Charles Skinner Matthews to his sister is the only contemporary chronicle of the proceedings. There is a confirmation of his account, together with some supplementary details, in a letter written, long afterwards, by Byron to John Murray. Remembering the ages and circumstances of the revellers—and remembering also that Moore's information was derived from some of them—we will try to get as near to the truth as the procurable evidence allows.

Byron, one must always bear in mind, had not yet conquered his place in county society, or in what is now called "smart" society. His mother's eccentricities and his guardian's chilly attitude had, as we have seen, kept him out of it. He actually knew

no peer who could or would introduce him when he took his seat in the House of Lords. The people whom he knew at home were chiefly provincial people of the professional classes. At Cambridge he had got into a fast, though not an unintellectual, set. He was very young, and he had plenty of credit, if not much ready money; and here was the "venerable pile" of Newstead—not the less venerable because it was dilapidated—at his disposal as a playground, and a place in which to dispense hospitality.

Naturally he wanted to show Newstead to his friends, whom he had never been able to entertain at home before. Naturally, having credit, he used it to fit up and furnish as much of Newstead as was necessary for their comfortable accommodation, not troubling to foresee the day—though he would not have had to look very far ahead in order to foresee it—when the bailiffs would be put in to seize the goods in default of payment. Naturally, as Mrs. Byron was so addicted to rattling the tongs and throwing the fire-irons at him, he did not want her there. Naturally, his college friends having fast tastes and habits, and no ladies of their own station being of the party, the method of their life did not follow the conventional round of the ordinary house-party. The pet bear, and the pet wolf, which guarded the entrances, were only symbols of the unusual and extravagant state of things within.

Breakfast, in theory, could be served at any hour. The hour actually preferred by the majority of the party was one P.M. Matthews, who generally came down between eleven and twelve, "was esteemed a prodigy of early rising." Any one, he says, who had wanted to breakfast as early as ten "would have been rather lucky to find any of the servants up." Not until

two P.M., as a rule, was the breakfast cleared away. The amusements of the afternoon—which Matthews euphemistically calls the morning—were "reading, fencing, single-stick, or shuttle-cock, in the great room, practising with pistols in the hall, walking, riding, cricket, sailing on the lake, playing with the bear, or teasing the wolf." Dinner was between seven and eight, and then—another euphemism most proper in a letter to a sister—"the evening diversions may be easily conceived."

Those evening diversions consisted, in the first instance of dressing up and drinking. The beverages, according to Byron himself, were "burgundy, claret, champagne, and what not," quaffed not only out of ordinary glasses, but also out of a loving-cup fashioned from a skull which had been dug up in the Newstead grounds. As for the dressing-up; "A set of monkish dresses," says Matthews, "which had been provided, with all the proper apparatus of crosses, beads, tonsures, &c., often gave a variety to our appearance and to our pursuits," which pursuits consisted, in Byron's words, of "buffooning all round the house in our conventual garments."

That Matthews speaks of tonsures as if they were articles of dress is neither here nor there; and there is no importance to be attached to his omission of all reference to the "buffooning." We know from Hobhouse that he played his part in it, and that one of the amusements of this brilliant young Fellow of Downing was to hide himself in a stone coffin in the Long Gallery and groan, by way of alarming his brother revellers. Evidently the Monks of Newstead, while taking some hints from the profane members of the Medmenham Hell Fire Club, carried out, to the best of their ability, the traditions of the Monks of

Thelema. “Fays ce que voudras” might have been their motto; and the doing of what they wished appears to have involved and included the extension of invitations to the cook and the housemaid to participate in their pleasures. Moore says so, not as one who makes a charge, but as one who makes an admission to rebut a graver charge, and is full of sympathy for the exuberance of lusty youth. Moralists must make what they can of the story, and apportion censure and indulgence as they think just.

The excesses, at any rate, whatever their degree and nature, did not fill Byron’s life. He was getting on with his poetry in spite of them, though it would be too much to say that he had yet proved his title to be called a poet.

“Hours of Idleness” had appeared while he was at Cambridge. The interest of that volume, nowadays, is far more biographical than poetical. When one has inferred from it that Byron did not pass through the University with a heart bowed down by the loss of Mary Chaworth, but flirted with a long series of the belles of Southwell, one has said nearly all that there is to say. The poems themselves, as the quotations given amply demonstrate, are no better than the general run of undergraduate verse composition. They are purely imitative; no new note rings in them. One is not surprised that Lord Carlisle, on receiving a presentation copy, was in a greater hurry to acknowledge than to read it, and merely remarked, in his acknowledgment that young men were better occupied in writing poetry than in devoting their valuable time to women and horses.

“Tolerably handsome,” was Byron’s first verdict on that letter; but he seems to have felt snubbed when

he read it over a second time. Lord Carlisle's opinions, he wrote to Miss Pigot, were nothing to him, but his guardian must not be "insolent." If he were insolent, he should be gibbeted, just as Butler of Harrow had been gibbeted. In fact, and to sum up:

> "Perhaps the Earl '*bears no brother near the throne*'—*if so*, I will make his *sceptre* totter *in his hands*."

Which shows that Byron's back was up, and that he was already in a fighting mood when the famous review in the *Edinburgh* introduced a jarring note into the chorus of approbation.

The author of the attack was not Jeffrey, as Byron thought, but Brougham. He had the excuse, for what it may be worth, that the poems had indubitably been over-praised because they had appeared under the signature of a nobleman. He, therefore, set out on the war path with the truculent air of a man whose conscience requires him to bludgeon a butterfly. The punishment, we cannot doubt, was very painful to the poet whom Cambridge undergraduates and Southwell belles had flattered; and the instant question for him was: Would he take his punishment lying down, or would he take it fighting?

That question, however, was not long in doubt. The Byrons were a fighting race; and the poet had inherited their love of fighting. Just as he had fought Lord Calthorpe at Harrow for calling him an atheist, so now he would fight the *Edinburgh* critic for calling him a fool. And he would fight him with his own weapons. Let him have three bottles of claret to prime him, and then he would strip for the fray, and would "take on," not the reviewer only, but every

one whom the reviewer had praised, and every one whom he himself disliked, or thought he might dislike if he knew him better. So he emptied his three bottles, and set to work on “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,” and having written twenty lines of it, “felt better.”

It is the poem in which his genius first begins to be apparent. Most of the judgments expressed in it were unjust—most of them were afterwards retracted by their author; but that does not matter. One does not expect sound criticism from poets—least of all does one expect it from poets of one-and-twenty. The essence of the thing is that now, in “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers” a new personality spoke—and spoke loud enough to be heard.

The note of Byron—the note which gained him his large and attentive audience—was his reckless audacity. He was not afraid of saying things; he did not wrap them up, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, but said them in plain language which all the world could understand—said them, moreover, in a manner which made them appear true even to those who thought, or wished to think, them false. His readers never knew what he would be saying next. They only knew that, whatever it was, he would say it effectively, and, as has already been remarked, with the air of one who damned the consequences. That was the note which was, in later years, to ring through “Don Juan.” We can already hear it ringing, as it were in anticipation, through the couplets of “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.”

Many examples might be cited; for the Satire, after the way of Satires, is almost entirely composed of damnatory clauses. Any piece of gossip was good

enough for Byron to lay hold of and use as a missile when running amok among literary reputations. The best instance, however, may be found in the passage in which he turned and rent Carlisle.

His original intention was to make himself pleasant to his guardian. He had no particular reason for liking him, but he had no definite case against him. There was the letter, of course, in which Carlisle had patronised the poet instead of praising his poetry; but he had got over his irritation about that, and did not bear malice; and so he prepared for publication these lines of fulsome eulogy:

> "*Ah, who would take their titles from their rhymes?*
> *On one alone Apollo deigns to smile,*
> *And crowns a new Roscommon in Carlisle.*"

But then, before the day of publication, occurred his quarrel with Carlisle. He thought that his guardian ought to have volunteered to introduce him when he took his seat in the House of Lords; he had the more reason for thinking so because his guardian was the only Peer of the Realm whom he knew. Carlisle, however, did not do so, contenting himself with instructing his ward as to the formalities to be fulfilled. The slight, whether intentional or not, was keenly felt—the more keenly because Byron was, at the moment, at war with all the world except Carlisle. *Et tu, Brute*, may very well have been his reflection.

So he had misjudged Carlisle. So Carlisle was as bad as other people—worse, indeed, because better things might reasonably have been expected from him. Very well. It was to be war between them, was it? Those who played at bowls must look out for

rubbers. Carlisle should see what kind of an antagonist he had provoked. He had threatened to make his sceptre totter in his hands. Now he would show that he could do it. So he struck out the lines of eulogy, and substituted:

> "*Yet did or Taste or Reason sway the times,*
> *Ah! who would take their titles with their rhymes!*
> *Roscommon! Sheffield! With your spirits fled,*
> *No future laurels deck a noble head;*
> *No Muse will cheer with renovating smile*
> *The paralytic puling of Carlisle.*"

Such was the Parthian shaft; and Byron, having discharged it, shook the dust of England from off his feet, and departed on the grand tour.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRAND TOUR—FLIRTATIONS IN SPAIN

The glory has long since departed from the grand tour. We all take it nowadays, with less and less sense of adventure, and more and more expectation of home comforts. Sir Henry Lunn has pegged out the course, and stationed lecturers along it at intervals,

to prevent us from confounding Scylla and Charybdis with Sodom and Gomorrah. They stir appropriate emotions in our breasts like stokers making up a fire. We play bridge in the evening on steamers "replete with every modern convenience"; and we are back again, in about six weeks, with a smattering of second-hand culture which goes the way of all smatterings in a very brief period of time. It is a shadowy, unreal, unsatisfactory business—a poor imitation of the grand tour as our forefathers knew it.

Some of them, no doubt, travelled frivolously and superficially. The Earl of Carlisle did so when he and Fox, as Samuel Rogers tells us, "travelled from Paris to Lyons for the express purpose of buying waistcoats and, during the whole journey, talked of nothing else." But there was plenty of emotion in travel for those who cared for it—a real impression of a widening horizon on which unusual figures might be expected to appear—a sense of escaping from the familiar crowd and plunging into an unknown world in which anything might happen. The temptation was strong for the traveller of temperament to strike an attitude and say: "Behold me! The old moorings were impossible; the old lights gave no guidance. I prefer to be adrift on a strange sea, seeking I know not what. Travel is my escape from life. A woman tempted me, and tortured me, and so, unless a woman heals the wound a woman gave——"

Chateaubriand sought the Orient in that spirit. Disgust and disillusion, as he tells us, drove him forth. Pauline de Beaumont was dead, and Madame de Chateaubriand was a woman hard to live with. He needed the consolations of religion; he needed to meditate at the tomb of Christ. Above all he needed,

when his meditations had fortified his mind, to meet Natalie de Noailles-Mouchy in the Court of the Lions at the Alhambra. He met her there, and travelled with her for three months in Spain, and presently found that he had only plucked yet another Dead Sea apple. And so he cried: “Behold me!” Similarly, in spite of the differences, with Byron.

It was a fixed article of faith with Chateaubriand that Byron had plagiarised his personality without acknowledgment. It was an act of envious vengeance, he said, for his own neglect to reply to a letter which Byron had written him while a schoolboy. That accusation, of course, is incredible and may be dismissed; but the resemblance between the two men was nevertheless as close as the differences of race allowed. Byron was as distinctly British, at intervals, as Chateaubriand was, at all times, distinctly French; and their points of view were to diverge widely as they grew older. Chateaubriand, an artistic Catholic, was to become one of the pillars of the Holy Alliance. Byron was to do more than any other man except Canning to pull the pillars of that temple down. But, in the meantime, the likeness was striking. There was about them both an equal air of cultivated gloom, an equal tendency to introspection, an equally intense interest in their personalities—that sense of the significance of the ego which was to be of the essence of the Romantic Movement—an equal readiness, as has been re-marked, to exclaim: Behold me!

The likeness is specially striking in the case of their journeys to the Orient. They sailed the same seas in the same spirit—with the one difference that Byron, who had a deadly hatred of certain kinds of hypocrisy, made no pretence in his quest for peace,

of looking to and fro between love and religion. In both cases alike, disgust for life was understood to have given the impulsion to the journey. A leading incident in both journeys was, as Byron bluntly puts it, “a passion for a married woman.” Neither passion gave the lover any lasting satisfaction. Both passions were proclaimed in enigmatic pæans to the world.

The two cantos of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” which chronicle the journey are also the record of the beginning of the Byronic pose. The picture of the Childe is the picture of René, with a difference—the difference being that, whereas Chateaubriand could never, even in a work of art, depreciate himself, Byron rejoiced in doing so. For the rest, the Childe was “tameless and swift and proud,” and worthless, and weary, and disillusioned, and disgusted. He had “spent his days in riot most uncouth”: he had “felt the fulness of satiety.” It was well that he had not won the woman whom he loved because his kiss “had been polution unto aught so chaste.” His boon companions were only “flatterers of the festal hour,” and “none did love him, not his lemans dear.” Wherefore behold him, on the Lisbon packet, in flight from himself, and seeking his “escape from life.”

That is the picture; that, as perhaps it would be better to put it, is the pose. It was to become a sincere and natural posture before the end; but it is impossible, at this early stage, to take it very seriously. Byron would himself have been the first to repudiate the suggestion that such men as Matthews, Hobhouse, and Hodgson were “heartless parasites of present cheer.” He had more respect for Matthews than for any man of his acquaintance; Hodgson was to be his most regular correspondent, and Hobhouse

the chosen companion of his journey. Moreover, he was only twenty-one—an age at which a young man is eager to see the world and needs no excuse for setting out to do so. His conception of himself as a forlorn exile impelled to wander because the world has betrayed and trifled with him is, in the main, a young man's literary affectation.

An affectation, no doubt, for which certain realities had furnished a hint. The fear of impending pecuniary embarrassment may sometimes have given the sound of revelry a hollow ring. The sarcasm of the *Edinburgh*, though repaid in kind, had certainly left a thin skin sore. The icy politeness of Carlisle had chilled an expansive heart, and given Byron the impression that he was regarded as an intruder in his own domain. Conjoined with his mother's nagging, it had made something of a three-cornered quarrel from which it was good to escape. He had also found himself more sentimental than he ought to be about Mary Chaworth. Here, at any rate, was something to exaggerate—a foundation of bad temper on which a superstructure of pessimism might be raised. Byron duly raised it, for literary purposes. But he had his high spirits as well as his low spirits; and the farewell lines which he sent from Falmouth to Hodgson suggest anything rather than a heart bowed down with woe.

"*Now at length we're off for Turkey,*
Lord knows when we shall come back!
Breezes foul and tempests murky
May unship us in a crack.
But since life at most a jest is,
As philosophers allow,
Still to laugh by far the best is,
Then laugh on—as I do now.

Laugh at all things,
Great and small things,
Sick or well, at sea or shore;
While we're quaffing,
Let's have laughing—
Who the devil asks for more?—
Some good wine! and who would lack it,
Ev'n on board the Lisbon packet?"

Those verses, quite as much as "'Tis done, and shivering in the gale"—and much more than anything in "Childe Harold,"—indicate the frame of mind in which Byron wished his native land good-night. He was travelling with all the paraphernalia of the grand tourist—with more servants than he could afford, and with the hearty, matter-of-fact John Cam Hobhouse for his companion to keep him out of mischief. Whatever he fled from, adventure was what he was looking for—not only the adventures which belong to the exploration of barbarous countries, but also those which are to be encountered in the boudoirs of garrison towns.

He landed at Lisbon and went to Cintra. He rode across Spain to Seville and Cadiz. He proceeded to Gibraltar, to Malta, to Albania, to Athens, and thence to Smyrna and the Dardanelles. He returned to Athens, and spent some time in exploring the interior of Greece. That, in outline, was the itinerary; and there were two adventures of which the letters to Hodgson show him to have been particularly proud. He swam the Hellespont, in imitation of Leander—a feat of which he boasts, over and over again, in every letter to every correspondent—and he indulged in "a passion for a married woman at Malta."

Nor was that his only passion. If it was the only

passion which he felt—which is doubtful—it certainly was not the only passion which he inspired. "Lord Byron," says Hobhouse, in his matter-of-fact way, "is, of course, very popular with all the ladies, as he is very handsome, amusing, and generous; but his attentions to all and sundry generally end, as on this occasion, in *rixæ femininæ*." We shall come to that story in a moment. It is preceded by a story of which the hint is in the lines beginning:

> "*Yet are Spain's maids no race of Amazons,*
> *But formed for all the witching arts of love*:"

a story of which the memory is in "Don Juan":

> "*'Tis pleasing to be schooled in a strange tongue*
> *By female lips and eyes—that is I mean,*
> *When both the teacher and the taught are young,*
> *As was the case, at least, where I have been.*"

It happened at Seville, where the travellers, as Hobhouse writes, "made the acquaintance of Admiral Cordova, with whose daughter Byron contrived to fall in love at very short notice."

Admiral Cordova was the Admiral who put up the fight which gained Sir John Jervis the title of Earl Saint Vincent. Byron had an introduction to the family, met Señorita Cordova at the theatre, and was invited to escort her home. It is not quite clear from the correspondence whether it was Señorita Cordova or some other lady who quarrelled with him because he would not give her the ring which he wore, as pledge of his affection; nor is it certain whether the ring was, or was not, a memento of Mary Chaworth. Whatever its origin, it was to be yielded up at the hour of the "passion for a married woman"; and

meanwhile there was another little incident of which Byron speaks, of all places in the world, in a letter to his mother:

> "We lodged in the house of two Spanish unmarried ladies.... The eldest honoured your *unworthy* son with very particular attention, embracing him with great tenderness at parting ... after cutting off a lock of his hair, and presenting him with one of her own, about three feet in length, which I send and beg you will retain till my return.... She offered me a share of her apartment, which my *virtue* induced me to decline."

That is all, and it is of no importance. The next stage was Gibraltar, and it is there, and on the voyage thence to Malta, that we get our first glimpse of Byron from the pen of an observer who observed, not as a matter of course, but as a matter of curiosity, and had a turn for picturesque description.

John Galt, afterwards famous as a Scotch novelist, was at Gibraltar when Byron arrived there. He had been sent to the Levant by a firm of traders to ascertain how far British goods could be exploited in defiance of the Berlin and Milan Decrees. He was to try hard, though in vain, to introduce such goods into the Greek archipelago, and to smuggle them into Spain. Half man of action and half dreamer, he went about denouncing priests and kings, and exhorting the British Government to seize all the islands everywhere for the supposed advantage of British commerce. Byron, condescendingly asking Hodgson to review one of his books favourably, describes him, with more or less of justice, as "a cock-brained man," and, remembering him at a later date, told Lady Blessington that he "could not awe him into a respect sufficiently profound for my sublime self, either as a

peer or an author."

This means, of course, that Galt, though he perceived the pose, did not abase himself in ecstasy before it. Seeing that he was a man of thirty, whereas Byron was only just of age, it was hardly to be expected that he would. Moreover, as a Scotsman, he would naturally take the side of the *Edinburgh* and maintain that Byron had done nothing to be conceited about. So he observed Byron—and we may be grateful to him for doing so—in a spirit of criticism and detachment.

> "His physiognomy," Galt writes, "was prepossessing and intelligent, but ever and anon his brows lowered and gathered; a habit, as I then thought, with a degree of affectation in it, probably first assumed for picturesque effect and energetic expression, but which I afterwards discovered was undoubtedly the occasional scowl of some unpleasant recollection: it was certainly disagreeable—forbidding—but still the general cast of his features was impressed with elegance and character."

That was the first impression, and the second impression was not more favourable:

> "In the little bustle and process of embarking their luggage, his lordship affected, as it seemed to me, more aristocracy than befitted his years or the occasion; and I then thought of his singular scowl, and suspected him of pride and irascibility. The impression that evening was not agreeable, but it was interesting; and that forehead mark, the frown, was calculated to awaken curiosity

and beget conjectures."

Galt, in short, contrasted Byron unfavourably with Hobhouse, whom he found "a cheerful companion" and "altogether an advantageous specimen of a well-educated English gentleman;" but it was Byron who intrigued him. He noticed what Byron ate—"no animal food, but only bread and vegetables"—and he reflected that "he had not acquired his knowledge of the world by always dining so sparingly." He even found his way "by cautious circumvallations into his intimacy"—though not very far into it, for "his uncertain temper made his favour precarious"; and finally we find him, as if in return for this precarious favour, drawing a picture of Byron which really can be called Byronic. The scene is the ship which conveys them both from Gibraltar to Malta:

> "When the lights were placed, he made himself a man forbid, took his station on the railing between the pegs on which the sheets are belayed and the shrouds, and there, for hours, sat in silence, enamoured, it may be, of the moon. All these peculiarities, with his caprices, and something inexplicable in the cast of his metaphysics, while they served to awaken interest, contributed little to conciliate esteem. He was often strangely rapt—it may have been from his genius; and, had its grandeur and darkness been then divulged, susceptible of explanation; but, at the time, it threw, as it were, round him the sackcloth of penitence. Sitting amidst the shrouds and rattlings, churming an inarticulate melody, he seemed almost apparitional, suggesting dim reminiscences of him who shot the albatross. He was as a

> mystery in a winding sheet, crowned with a halo."

One quotes the passage in full because it is the earliest coloured picture of the theatrical Byron—the fatal man of gloom and splendour on whom so much limelight was presently to be thrown. Whether Byron was posing for Galt—or whether Galt magnified the pose in the light of subsequent events—it is, of course, at this date, impossible to say. Perhaps both things happened, and the picture owes a little to each of them. At all events the beginning of Byronism—of the outward, visible Byronism, that is to say—is there. It is just the picture which we feel we have a right to look for of the fatal man divining the doom which he is unable to resist—alone in the midst of the crowd—his own personality creating a void around him—proceeding to his first "passion for a married woman."

That passion awaited him as soon as he landed at Malta. The woman who inspired it was Mrs. Spencer Smith—the "Florence" of "Childe Harold:"

> "*Sweet Florence! could another ever share*
> *This wayward, loveless heart, it would be thine.*"

But Mrs. Spencer Smith has a story of her own which it is worth while to turn aside and tell.

CHAPTER VII

FLORENCE SPENCER SMITH

Mrs. Spencer Smith was the daughter of an Austrian Ambassador and the wife of an English Minister Plenipotentiary. “Married unhappily, yet has never been impeached in point of character,” says Byron in a letter to his mother. There are no details forthcoming about that, however. All that one can affirm is that her husband only appears as a shadowy figure in the background of her adventures, leaving the leading *rôle* to other men, while he serves his country at the other end of Europe.

He was a younger brother of Sir Sidney Smith, who had checked Napoleon’s victorious career at Acre. Napoleon, it is said by some French writers, loathed the very name of Smith after that calamity, held all the Smiths jointly and severally responsible for it, and swore to wreak his vengeance on the first Smith who fell into his hands. Consequently, the same writers add, when he heard that a Mrs. Smith was staying at Venice—a city then in his power—he felt that his long-delayed hour of triumph had come, and gave his orders accordingly.

That version of the story, however, is too good to be true. Mrs. Spencer Smith, in fact, was suspected, whether rightly or wrongly, of having played some part, as a secret agent, in some conspiracy against Napoleon. She had been betrayed, or denounced; she was being watched; and she walked, unaware of her danger, into the snare that had been set. Venice, it had seemed to her, would be a safe place of refuge when the over-running of northern Italy by the

French armies made it awkward for her to remain at the Baths of Valdagno, where she had been staying for the benefit of her health. Her sister, Countess Attems, lived at Venice, and she went to visit her.

She was young, accomplished, beautiful—"like one of those apparitions," says the Duchesse d'Abrantès, "which come to us in our happiest dreams." She spoke seven languages, and looked down demurely —"a habit," the Duchesse d'Abrantès continues, "which only added to her charms." A Sicilian boy of twenty, the Marquis de Salvo, begged for an introduction, was presented, and fell in love. He had hardly done so—he had not even declared himself—when he lighted upon his chance of proving his devotion by rendering help in time of trouble.

General Lauriston, Napoleon's aide-de-camp, arrived at Venice with a commission to act as Military Governor in his pocket; and then the trouble began. Mrs. Spencer Smith was sent for by the Chief of Police and requested to leave the town and take a residence in the country. She had hardly begun to look for one when there arrived four gendarmes, with the intimation that she was to remain in her apartment, and that they were to see that she did so. The Marquis de Salvo then volunteered to call on the Chief of Police and inquire the meaning of this rigorous measure. The Chief of Police first talked vaguely to him about Napoleon's prejudice against the name of Smith, and then hinted that there might be more specific reasons for his severity. He added that his orders were to conduct Mrs. Smith under an escort to Milan; "and I rather fancy," he concluded, "that she is to be detained in the fortress of Valenciennes."

That was the boy's chance. He was a boy in years, but a man in courage and resource. He ran to Mrs. Spencer Smith, repeated what he had been told, and promised that he would save her.

At first she hesitated. He would be taking a risk, she said, which he had no right to take. He probably expected a reward which her "principles" would not permit her to grant. But the boy, as it happened, was as chivalrous as he was brave. Perhaps he loved noble actions for their own sake. At all events he loved adventure; and here was the prospect of an adventure such as rarely comes the way of a youth fresh from school. As for the risks, he said, he did not fear them. As for reward, he would not ask for any. If Mrs. Spencer Smith would let him save her she should be saved. He had thought the matter out, and made his plans. All that was necessary was that she should take a maid with her whom she could trust. Everything else might be left to him.

Then Florence Spencer Smith thanked Salvo, and promised to accept his aid. She too was of the age at which one is grateful to life for adventures; and, if she must choose between the two evils, well then she would rather be compromised than locked up. So she made sure of her maid, and got into the carriage which the gendarmes provided. There were five of them, including the brigadier; and Salvo sought, and obtained, leave to ride with them in the vague character of "friend of the family." The gendarmes, he found, were excellent fellows, quite unsuspicious, and very sympathetic. The brigadier was specially sympathetic because he was lost in admiration of Mrs. Smith's faithful maid; and Salvo, having carefully thought out his coup, watched all the chances.

It had been agreed that Mrs. Smith should plead ill health, and ask to be allowed to journey by short stages. No objections were raised—probably because of the pleasure which the brigadier took in the society of the maid—and the party halted, first at Verona, and then at Brescia. At Verona nothing could be done. An Italian friend, whom Salvo implored to meet and help him, failed to keep the appointment, guessing why he was wanted, and fearing Napoleon's long arm. He must, therefore, act alone; and the question was whether he could find a means of getting Mrs. Smith on board a boat and across the Lake of Garda. Probably he could if he could first see her alone and concert a scheme with her. So he galloped off to the lake side, hired two boats, and bought a post chaise, in which he proposed to drive Mrs. Smith up into the mountains, and over the frontier into Austria. Then he galloped back, told the brigadier that he was obliged to return to Venice, and begged to be allowed to say good-bye to Mrs. Smith without witnesses.

The brigadier, who liked to be alone with the maid, could quite understand that the marquis liked to be alone with the mistress. He winked a wicked eye, called the marquis "a sad dog," and gave permission. Salvo winked back at him, as if admitting the impeachment of sad doggedness, and, in the brief interview which the brigadier supposed to be consecrated to sentiment, told Mrs. Smith what he had plotted, and how she herself must act.

He would return, after night-fall, with a rope ladder. In order to avoid the suspicions of the inquisitive, he would make that rope ladder with his own hands. He would pack it up into a parcel, and Mrs. Smith must lower a piece of string with which to draw it up. The

parcel would also contain a boy's costume, as a disguise for her, and a dose of laudanum with which to drug the maid's evening drink in case she were not a party to the conspiracy. He would come again at eleven, wearing a cocked hat, and enveloped in a military cloak. Mrs. Smith, understanding who was there, must then make the ladder fast and climb down to him.

He came; and things happened more or less as he had planned them. The maid, in particular, was magnificently loyal. She offered to attend her mistress in her flight; and, when told that that could not be, she handed out her mistress' jewels, helped in securing the ladder to the verandah, promised to remove it after it had served its purpose, and then tossed off the soporific of her own accord, so that it might be physically impossible for her to answer questions for some hours to come—incidentally also, no doubt, in order to give the brigadier the excuse which he would naturally desire for acquitting her of all complicity in the escape.

Mrs. Smith descended the ladder half way, and then fell off it; but Salvo had expected that. He caught her in his arms, and they got into their carriage and were off. The gates of the town were closed; but Salvo bluffed his way through them in an instant, with the help of his military cloak and head-gear.

"What in thunder do you mean by keeping me waiting? I'm the colonel of the twenty-fifth. You were warned to look out for me. You'll hear of this again, my man. Open the gate at once, and let me through."

Thus the boy swore in the full-blooded military style of the period. The gate was thrown open for him

with profound apologies. He whipped up the horses, and galloped to Salona, where the boats were ready. They embarked, taking their carriage with them, and crossed to Riva. There they got into the carriage again, and galloped on to Trent, where a sleepy official, much in wrath at this disturbance of his slumbers, proceeded to make trouble about their passports, which were only approximately in order. The only course, since time pressed, and pursuers were on their track, was to leave the chaise behind and slip away surreptitiously in a country cart which an inn-keeper offered to sell them.

The pursuers, indeed, were hard upon their heels; but happily the morning sun was in their eyes. The fugitives saw them before they were seen, and drove their cart down from the mountain road through the forest to the torrent, so that the horsemen missed them and rode past them. After that, they abandoned their cart, and travelled by cross country roads and mountain paths, continually in peril of arrest, but always escaping as if by a miracle. A peasant, to whom they appealed for food and shelter, proposed to conduct them to the nearest police station, but was melted to tenderness by Mrs. Smith's tears and pitiful entreaties. They read the offer of a reward for their capture posted on the walls. They hid themselves for two days in a mountain chapel. They were stopped, and questioned, and mistaken for other more romantic fugitives—an Italian Princess who was said to have eloped with an Italian bookseller's assistant. They disguised themselves as peasants, and travelled in the midst of the real peasants' flocks of sheep. Not until after many days' wanderings did they reach Austrian territory, declare their true identity, and claim the protection of the law; and even so their troubles were not over.

Austria, at that date, had not yet recovered either morally or materially from the shock of Austerlitz, and dared not stand openly between Napoleon and his prey. The fugitives had to be arrested before they could be saved. Salvo was, for a while, locked up, like a criminal, in the deepest dungeon of a Styrian Castle; and Mrs. Smith was smuggled out of the country, under the name of Frau Müller—first to Riga, and thence to England, where Salvo ultimately joined her. Queen Charlotte thanked him publicly for the service so gallantly rendered to a British subject; and he made his best bow and withdrew, remembering his promise to expect no other recompense.

Such is the story of Mrs. Smith's adventure as told, first by Salvo himself, who wrote a book about it, and then by the Duchesse d'Abrantès, who devoted a long section of her Memoirs to it. One repeats it, partly for its own sake and partly because the romance of it explains how the heroine of it appealed to Byron's imagination.

She was the first really interesting—or, at all events, the first really remarkable—woman whom he had met. The women whom he had previously known had been very conventional young persons of the upper middle classes. Even Mary Chaworth had been *bourgeoise*, or must have seemed so in comparison with Mrs. Spencer Smith. To meet her was to encounter, for the first time, the amazing realities of life, and to find more romance in them than even a poet dared to dream of without reality to prompt him. And she was married, and it made no difference—or none except that, being married, she had more liberty, and could be more audacious than a spinster. "Since my arrival here," Byron writes—still to his

mother—"I have had scarcely any other companion." There is an unmistakable note of self-complacency in the confession. Byron's "passion for a married woman" was evidently signalling to him, as such a passion has signalled to many a young man before and after him, that, now at last, he was grown up.

Galt says that the attachment was merely "Platonic." Possibly Galt was right, though his evidence goes for nothing, seeing that Byron looked down upon him from far too Olympian a height to be in the least likely to confide in him. The impression which Mrs. Spencer Smith, from the little that we know about her, gives is that of the type of the favourite heroine of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones' more serious plays—a woman, that is to say, who shows herself of a very "coming-on" disposition until a certain point is reached, but then stops suddenly short, being frightened and abashed by her own temerity. She asked Byron for his ring—the ring which the Spanish lady had asked him for in vain—and he gave it to her. "Soon after this I sailed for Malta, and there parted with both heart and ring," is his own way of putting it; and as Galt knew that she had got the ring, there seem to be grounds for the conjecture that she showed it and boasted of it.

Anything else, however, it would be idle to conjecture, even though we have "Childe Harold" and sundry "Lines" to help us in the quest.

The suggestion in "Childe Harold" is that Mrs. Spencer Smith made love to Byron in vain:

> "*Fair Florence found, in sooth, with some amaze,*
> *One who, 'twas said, still sighed to all he saw,*
> *Withstand, unmoved, the lustre of her gaze*

_____"

The suggestion in the "Lines" is different:

"*Oh, lady! When I left the shore,*
The distant shore which gave me birth,
I hardly thought to grieve once more,
To quit another spot on earth:

"*Yet, here amidst this barren isle,*
Where panting Nature droops the head,
Where only thou art seen to smile,
I view my parting hour with dread."

We must make what we can of that; and it really matters very little what we make of it. This "passion for a married woman" was an inevitable stage of the sentimental pilgrimage. Byron was bound to halt there for a little while, if not for long; and it was not to be expected that he would, like Ulysses, stuff his ears with wool while passing the Siren's Isle. That is not the way of poets, and that is not the way of youth. He was bound, too, to fancy, for a moment, that the passion meant a great deal to him, even though, in fact, it meant but little; for that also is the way of youth and poets. And hardly less inevitable, though both of them knew that no hearts were being broken was the idea that Fate was cruel to decree their parting, and that, while they acted wisely, they must also suffer for their wisdom. And therefore:

"*Though Fate forbids such things to be,*
Yet by thine eyes and ringlets curled!
I cannot lose *a* world *for thee,*
But would not lose thee *for a* World."

And therefore again, just two months later:

"*The spell is broke, the charm is flown!*
Thus is it with Life's fitful fever:
We madly smile when we should groan;
Delirium is our best deceiver.
Each lucid interval of thought
Recalls the woes of Nature's charter;
And He *that acts as* wise men ought,
But lives—*as Saints have died—a martyr.*"

That is all; and the story which the lines half cover up and half disclose is clearly of very little consequence. Mrs. Smith had enjoyed her flirtation, and had had verses written to her—much better verses than had been addressed to any of the belles of Southwell. Byron had posed, not knowing for certain whether he posed or not, had undergone a necessary experience, and had passed through the fire unhurt. The experiences which were really to matter to him were yet to come—though not immediately; and he had hardly finished writing verses to Mrs. Spencer Smith when he began writing verses to the Maid of Athens.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAID OF ATHENS—MRS. WERRY—MRS. PEDLEY—THE SWIMMING OF THE

HELLESPONT

"*Maid of Athens, ere we part,*
Give, oh give me back my heart!"

It would be superfluous to quote more of the poem than that; and it would be absurd to attach importance to the episode which it commemorates.

Byron came to Athens after an expedition, with Hobhouse, into the heart of Albania. He was, according to Hobhouse's Diary, "all this time engaged in writing a long poem in the Spenserian stanzas," the poem being, of course, the first canto of "Childe Harold." That the travellers roughed it a good deal is evident from Hobhouse's description of a supper whereat "Byron, with his sabre, cut off the head of a goose which shared our room with a collection of pigs and cows, and so we got an excellent roast." He was much pleased with his reception by Ali Pasha, who said "he was certain I was a man of birth because I had small ears, curling hair, and little white hands." He was also, at the same time, brooding on his "passion for a married woman," and no doubt felt himself years older in consequence of that passion; and then, arriving at Athens, he fell in love, or fancied or pretended that he was in love, with his landlady's daughter.

That was the social status of the Maid of Athens. Her mother, Theodora Macri, the widow of a former British Vice-Consul, had been reduced to letting lodgings—a sitting-room and two bedrooms, looking on to a courtyard, much patronised by English travellers, and highly recommended by them. There were three daughters, and there are passages in Byron's letters which might be read to mean that he

was equally in love with all of them. “An attachment to three Greek girls” is his summary of the incident to Hodgson; but he distinguished one of them by the special homage of a poem destined to be one of the most famous in the English language, with the result that Theresa Macri, Maid of Athens, became an institution, and that subsequent lodgers made much of her, looking for a romance where there had, in fact, been little more than the formal salute of the ships passing in the night. Hugh W. Williams, the artist, who was at Athens in 1817, depicts them for us:

> “On the crown of the head of each is a red Albanian skull-cap, with a blue tassel spread out and fastened down like a star. Near the edge or bottom of the skull-cap is a handkerchief of various colours bound round their temples. The youngest wears her hair loose, falling on her shoulders.”



The Maid of Athens.

That, no doubt, was how Theresa wore her hair when Byron flattered her with his attentions. She also, it seems, wore “white stockings and yellow slippers,” and had “teeth of pearly whiteness” and “manners such as would be fascinating in any country.” It was the usual thing, according to Williams, for their mother’s lodgers to flirt with one or other of them. It would have been “remarkable,” he thinks, if they had not done so. Presumably he did

so himself. At all events he admired them very much as they sat "in the Eastern style, a little reclined, with their limbs gathered under them on the divan, and without shoes"; but he insists with no less emphasis upon their propriety than upon their graces. "Modesty and delicacy of conduct," he comments, "will always command respect"; and further:

> "Though so poor, their virtues shine as conspicuous as their beauty.... Not all the wealth of the East, or the complimentary lays even of the first of England's poets could render them so truly worthy of love and admiration."

Moore tells us that Byron, in Oriental style, gashed himself across the breast with a dagger as a symbolic demonstration of his conquest by Theresa's charms, and that Theresa "looked on very coolly during the operation, considering it a fit tribute to her beauty, but in no degree moved to gratitude." And that, of course, is what one would expect. The game was being played according to the rules, and Theresa was child enough to enjoy the fun. One can imagine that it was a game which the girls often played with the lodgers, teaching them the rules when they did not already know them. One would be churlish indeed to begrudge them their enjoyment, or to protest that they were "forward" or suspect that they were "designing." The landlady's daughter can often do much to make life in a lodging-house agreeable; and youth must have its hour though time flies and love, like a bird, is on the wing.

Our next glimpse of Theresa, taken from Walsh's "Narrative of a Residence in Constantinople," shows us that time is, indeed, an "ever-rolling stream,"

carrying its daughters, as well as its sons away upon the flood. “Lord Byron’s poem,” writes Walsh in 1817, “has rendered the poor lady no temporal service though it has ensured her immortality”; and he continues:

> “She was once very lovely, I was informed by those who knew her, and realised all the descriptive part of the poem; but time and, I suppose, disappointed hopes preyed upon her, and though still very elegant in her person, and gentle and lady-like in her manners, she has lost all pretensions to beauty, and has a countenance singularly marked by hopeless sadness.”

That, no doubt, is the exaggeration of a sentimentalist. Theresa’s hopes can hardly have been serious. Landladies’ daughters, have too many hopes deferred and disappointed to allow the disappointment of any hope in particular to blight their lives. Theresa, in due course, became Mrs. Black, the wife, like her mother, of a vice-consul; and she lived to the great age of eighty, “a tall old lady,” writes the United States Consular Agent at Athens, “with features inspiring reverence, and showing that at a time past she was a beautiful woman.” Her countrymen, however, did not forget that she had been the Maid of Athens; and, Byron’s services to the Greek cause being also remembered, a public subscription provided for the necessities of her last years. That is all that there is to say about her unless it be to repeat that she played but a very minor part in the pageant of Byron’s life, and cannot even be spoken of as Mrs. Spencer Smith’s only rival.

For there were others; and though the other stories

are clouded with a good deal of doubt, they cannot fail to leave a certain collective impression of Byron as a man whom all women found attractive and many women found susceptible.

At Smyrna, for instance, there was a Mrs. Werry, whose name and effusive proceedings are mentioned by Hobhouse:

> "Mrs. Werry actually cut off a lock of Byron's hair on parting from him to-day, and shed a good many tears. Pretty well for fifty-six years at least!"

At Athens, too, there was a second affair of which there is a full and circumstantial account in Medwin's "Conversations of Lord Byron." The heroine was a Turkish girl of whom Byron was "fond as I have been of few women." All went well, he told Medwin, until the Fast of Ramadan, when Law and Religion prohibit love-making for forty days, and the women are not allowed to quit their apartments. An attempt to arrange an assignation at this season was detected. The penalty was to be death, and Byron was to be kept in ignorance of everything until it was too late to interfere:

> "A mere accident only enabled me to prevent the completion of the sentence. I was taking one of my usual evening rides by the sea-side, when I observed a crowd of people moving down to the shore, and the arms of the soldiers glittering among them. They were not so far off but that I thought I could now and then distinguish a faint and stifled shriek. My curiosity was forcibly excited, and I despatched one of my followers to inquire the cause of the procession. What was my

> horror to learn that they were carrying an unfortunate girl, sewn up in a sack, to be thrown into the sea! I did not hesitate as to what was to be done. I knew I could depend on my faithful Albanians, and rode up to the officer commanding the party, threatening in case of his refusal to give up his prisoner, that I would adopt means to compel him. He did not like the business he was on, or perhaps the determined look of my bodyguard, and consented to accompany me back to the city with the girl, whom I discovered to be my Turkish favourite. Suffice it to say that my interference with the chief magistrate, backed by a heavy bribe, saved her; but it was only on condition that I should break off all intercourse with her, and that she should immediately quit Athens, and be sent to her friends in Thebes. There she died, a few days after her arrival, of a fever, perhaps of love."

"Perhaps of love" is the typical finishing touch of the "fatal man;" but Medwin may have added it. To Byron, at any rate, the incident counted for no more than any of the other incidents; but it was followed, or is said to have been followed, by an incident which counted for even less—the incident of the beautiful Mrs. Pedley, related in a curious anonymous work entitled: "The life, Writings, Opinions, and Times of the Right Hon. G. G. Noel Byron," published in 1825.

Byron met Mrs. Pedley at Malta on his way home. She was the wife of a Dr. Pedley, beautiful and frivolous—addicted, it may be, to levity, as a relief from the dulness of garrison life. Her husband, for

reasons which we are left to conjecture, turned her out of his house. She came to Byron's house, sat down on the door-step, and refused to go. Perhaps she argued that, as Byron had loved one married woman, he was prepared to love all married women; but if so, she argued wrongly. Byron begged her to return to her home, and when she declined to do so, he sent a note to Dr. Pedley to ask what he had better do with her. The Dr.'s answer was to pack up the lady's clothes and other belongings and send them to Byron's rooms, with a message to the effect that he wished him joy of the adventure. The upshot of it all was that Byron consented to take Mrs. Pedley to England, but gave her very little of his society, and parted with her immediately on landing.

Such, at all events, is the story as the anonymous biographer relates it, though it is impossible to say on what authority it reposes. Even if it rests upon gossip, and is untrue, it helps to fill in the picture by reflecting the reputation which Byron was making for himself during his Oriental travels: a reputation, on the one hand, of a man who made love with cynical recklessness, and on the other hand of a man who swaggered round the Levant with unwarrantable arrogance and pride.

We have already seen him swaggering about his swimming of the Hellespont. He continued to swagger about it to the very end of his life. Even in "Don Juan" there is a well-known reference to the exploit:

> "*A better swimmer you could scarce see ever;*
> *He could, perhaps, have passed the Hellespont,*
> *As once (a feat on which ourselves we prided)*
> *Leander, Mr. Ekenhead, and I did.*"

It was a considerable feat, no doubt, though he was only an hour and ten minutes in the water; but the anonymous biographer already quoted adds some details which make it, if not more glorious, at least more dramatic. Byron, according to this version of the story, was helped out of the water in a state of extreme exhaustion, and lay three days in a fisherman's hut, nursed and tended by the fisherman's wife. The fisherman did not in the least know whom he was entertaining, but believed his guest, whose language he could not speak, to be a needy shipwrecked sailor. On his departure, therefore, he pressed on him not only bread and cheese and wine, but also a few copper coins. Byron accepted the gift, without attempting to explain, and a few days afterwards sent his servant with a return gift: a brace of pistols, a fowling piece, a fishing net, and some silk to make a gown for the fisherman's wife. The fisherman was so overwhelmed that he set out at once in his boat to thank the generous donor, and was caught in a sudden squall and drowned.

That is a story of which it is impossible to say whether it is true or only well invented. We are on safer ground in taking the testimony of the well-known people who met Byron in the course of his journey; and our principal witnesses are Lady Hester Stanhope, who passed him at Athens on her way to Lebanon, Sir Stratford Canning, afterwards Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, the "great Eltchi," then Secretary of Embassy at Constantinople, and John Galt, who was still going his rounds as a high-class commercial traveller. No one of the three is extravagantly eulogistic, and all three bear witness to the pose, the swagger, and the arrogance.

"A sort of Don Quixote fighting with the police for a

woman of the town," is Lady Hester's verdict, suggested, no doubt, by the adventure on which Byron put such a different colour when he related it to Medwin. "He wanted," she continues, "to make himself something great," but she will not allow that he succeeded. "He had a great deal of vice in his looks," she says, "his eyes set close together and a contracted brow"; and, as for his poetry, Lady Hester shakes her head even over that:

> "At Athens, I saw nothing in him but a well-bred man, like many others; for, as for poetry, it is easy enough to write verses; and as for the thoughts, who knows where he got them? Many a one picks up some old book that nobody knows anything about, and gets his ideas out of it."

That reflection, perhaps, always supposing that Dr. Merryon has reported it correctly, throws a brighter flood of light upon the critic's mind than upon the poet's genius; but the criticism offered by Sir Stratford Canning was a criticism of matters which he understood. He "cannot," he says, "forbear to record" what happened when Byron obtained permission to be present at an audience granted by the Sultan to the *corps diplomatique*. There is a reference to the story in Moore's "Journal"; but the authorised version must be sought in Lord Stratford de Redcliffe's Papers:

> "We had assembled," he writes, "in the hall of our so-called palace when Lord Byron arrived in scarlet regimentals topped by a profusely feathered cocked hat, and, coming up to me, asked what his place as a peer of the realm was to be in the procession. I

> referred him to Mr. Adair, who had not yet left his room, and the upshot of their private interview was that, as the Turks ignored all but officials, any amateur, though a peer, must be content to follow in the wake of the Embassy. His lordship thereupon walked away with that look of scornful indignation which so well became his fine, imperious features."

"As Canning refused to walk behind him, Byron went home," is Hobhouse's laconic report of the incident; but when a letter from the Ambassador followed him, he apologised. His fancy dress, it had seemed to him, was quite as becoming as other people's uniforms; he had honestly supposed himself to be standing out for the legitimate rights of a peer of the realm. As this was not so—as the Austrian Internuncio had been consulted and had said that it was not so—then he would be glad to join the procession as a simple individual, and humbly to follow his Excellency and "his ox or his ass or anything that was his." Whether that was a subtle way of calling Stratford Canning an ass does not appear; but the transaction was a characteristic exhibition of the neck-or-nothing audacity of Byron's undisciplined youth. He figures, at this date, as a Lord among adventurers and an adventurer among Lords.

Stratford Canning saw him in the latter and John Galt in the former light. At a dinner-party at which they were both present, "he seemed inclined," says Galt, "to exact a deference to his dogmas that was more lordly than philosophical"; and he continues:

> "It was too evident ... that without intending

> wrong, or any offence, the unchecked humour of his temper was, by its caprices, calculated to prevent him from ever gaining that regard to which his talents and freer moods, independently of his rank, ought to have entitled him. Such men become objects of solicitude, but never of esteem."

The fair inference seems to be that Byron had let Galt perceive the great gulf fixed between peers of the realm and commercial travellers. It was the sort of thing that he would do when in a bad temper, though not when in a good one. Galt, however, not only submitted to the snub, but accounted for it like a philosopher. Byron, he says, was in trouble at this time, not about his soul, but about his remittances; and "the false dignity he assumed" was really "the apprehension of a person of his rank being exposed to require assistance among strangers." One can certainly find support for the supposition in his urgent letters home.

In due course, however, the remittances turned up, and Byron recovered his affability and resumed his journey. Hobhouse left him and returned alone. "Took leave," he notes in his Diary, "*non sine lacrymis*, of this singular young person, on a little stone terrace at the end of the bay, dividing with him a little nosegay of flowers." There had been some coolness between them, and this was the sentimental renewal of their friendship. A return visit to Athens was the next stage, but there does not appear to have been any resumption of the old relations with the Maid of Athens. On the contrary, it was on this second visit to Athens that Lady Hester Stanhope discovered the poet "fighting the police for a woman of the town."

At Athens, too, Byron met his old Cambridge acquaintance, Lord Sligo, from whom we obtain, through Moore, some further glimpses at his manner of life and characteristic affectations. He was once more, it seems, constrained to combat the flesh by means of self-denying ordinances, and, to that end, took three Turkish baths a week, and confined himself to a diet of rice and vinegar and water. This system, and a fever contracted at Patras, made him very pale; and he felt that to be pale was to be interesting.

> "Standing one day before a looking glass," Moore tells us, "he said to Lord Sligo:
>
> "'How pale I look! I should like, I think, to die of a consumption!'
>
> "'Why of a consumption?' asked his friend.
>
> "'Because then,' he answered, 'all the women would say, "See that poor Byron—how interesting he looks in dying!"'"

But that is another of the stories which throw at least as much light on the reporter as on the reported. Lord Sligo, no doubt, was the sort of healthy, wooden-headed young Philistine on whom it is a joy to test the effect of such remarks. Byron, in thus posing for him, was, so to say, "trying it on the dog." There is no such foolishness in his correspondence with those whom he regarded as his intellectual equals, and one cannot conclude the account of his travels better than by quoting his summary of their moral effect contained in a letter to Hodgson:

> "I hope you will find me an altered personage—I do not mean in body but in

> manner, for I begin to find out that nothing but virtue will do in this damned world. I am tolerably sick of vice, which I have tried in its agreeable varieties, and mean, on my return, to cut all my dissolute acquaintance, leave off wine and carnal company, and betake myself to politics and decorum."

To what extent, and within what limits, he carried out these good resolutions, we shall observe as we proceed.

CHAPTER IX

RETURN TO ENGLAND—PUBLICATION OF "CHILDE HAROLD"

July 1811 saw Byron back in England after two years' absence, but in no hurry, for various reasons, to return to Newstead. The "venerable pile" had been desecrated by the invasion of bailiffs in connection with an unpaid upholsterer's bill; and Mrs. Byron was living there, and was, as usual, quarrelling with her neighbours. Byron, in one of his letters from the Levant, tells her that she cannot deny that she is a "vixen," and suggests that she is in the habit of drinking more champagne than is good for her. It was only to be expected that she would rattle the

fire-irons, and throw the tongs, as furiously as ever—even if a little less accurately—under the stimulating influence. He lingered, therefore, at Reddish's Hotel, Saint James's Street; and it was there that the news of her sudden illness—the result, it is said, of shock caused by the magnitude of the afore-mentioned upholsterer's bill—surprised him. He hurried to her, but the news of her death met him on his way.

He had not loved her. We have passed many proofs of that, and many others could be given. She had taunted him with his deformity, and he believed—so he told Lord Sligo—that he owed it to her "false delicacy" at his birth. She had not understood him, and he had fled before her violence. Unable to love her, he had missed a precious emotion to which he felt himself entitled—that may be one of the secrets of his persistent view of himself as a lonely man, without a friend in a lonely world. If he was shaken by the sudden sundering of the tie, it would have been too much to expect him to be prostrated by his grief, or to do more than pay his brief tribute to the solemnity of death, remembering that there had been signs of tenderness in the midst of, or in the intervals between, the storms of passion.

"Oh, Mrs. By," he exclaimed to his mother's maid. "I had but one friend in the world, and she is gone"; but he always said that of every friend who died—of Skinner Matthews who was drowned in the Cam; of John Wingfield who was drowned off Coimbra; and of Eddleston, the choir boy, whom he had admitted to his intimacy at Cambridge. He said it quite sincerely, giving emotion its hour, and then let his thoughts flow in other directions. On the day of Mrs. Byron's funeral he told his servant to fetch the gloves and spar with him; and the boy thought that he hit

harder than usual. Then he threw down the gloves and left the room without a word, with the air of a man disgusted with himself for trying to kill devils like that; and presently he was in the thick of his preparations for the production of “Childe Harold.”

He had brought the manuscript of “Childe Harold” home with him, together with the manuscript of “Hints from Horace.” He believed “Hints from Horace” to be much the greater work of the two; and his reasons for thinking so are easy to understand. “Hints from Horace” was a satire based on the best models, and composed on conventional lines. It could be compared with the models, and judged and “marked,” like a schoolboy’s theme. “Childe Harold” was an experiment. It expressed a personality—the personality of a very young man who was not yet quite sure of himself and, except when his temper was up, was afraid of being laughed at. Hobhouse—that candid, trusty, matter-of-fact friend—had seen it, and had criticised it pretty much in the spirit in which Mark Twain’s jumping frog was criticised. He had failed to see any points in that poem different from any other poem. Byron, consequently, was sensitive and timorous about it. “Childe Harold,” he felt, like “Hours of Idleness,” would put him on his defence, whereas in “Hints from Horace,” as in “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,” he would have the advantage of attacking. He needed the encouragement of flattery.

One Dallas, a distant relative who now introduced himself and, for a season, doubled the parts, as it were, of literary mentor and literary valet, supplied the flattery, recognising that, whereas “Hints from Horace” was just a satire like another, “Childe Harold” was the expression of a new sentiment,

hitherto unheard in English literature. “Hints from Horace,” he thought, might be published, if the author wished it—it did not much matter one way or the other; but “Childe Harold” must be published. It was interesting; it was romantic; it would please. It was not merely a narrative, but a manifesto. It ignored conventions, lifted a mask, and revealed a man—a new and unsuspected type of man—beneath it.

So Dallas spoke and wrote; and Byron let himself be persuaded. He yielded, at first, with reluctance—or perhaps it was only with a pretence of reluctance; but, after he had yielded, he entered into the spirit of the situation. He would not only publish, but he would publish with *éclat*. If he could not command success, he would deserve it, and would be careful not to throw away a chance. He would not be contented with a publisher who merely printed a few copies of the poem, pushed them outside the back-door, and waited to see what would happen. The minds of men—and women—should be duly prepared for the sensation in store for them. Whatever the mountain might be destined to bring forth, at least it should be visibly in labour. Publication should be preluded by a noise as of the rolling of logs.

The money did not matter. The “magnificent man”—and there was a good deal of Aristotle’s “magnificent man” about Byron at this period—could not soil his hands by taking money for a poem even for the purpose of discharging his debt to the upholsterers whose bills were frightening his mother out of her life. Perish the mean thought! If there was money in the poem, Dallas might have it for himself. All that the author wanted was glory—a “boom,” as we

vulgar moderns say—and that arresting noise already referred to, as of the rolling of logs. Dallas must see to that to the best of his ability, and he himself would lend a hand. Above all, there must be no hole-and-corner publishing. Cawthorne must on no account have the book—his status was not good enough. Miller was the man, and, failing Miller, Murray. On the whole it was to Murray that it would be best to go. Murray was the coming man—one could divine him as the publisher of the future, and he had, on his side divined Byron as the poet of the future, and expressed a wish to "handle" some of his work.

So Dallas went to Murray, and got five hundred guineas for the copyright; and then the sound of the rolling of the logs began. Galt heard it. Galt, being himself a man of letters as well as a commercial traveller, knew what it was that he heard. Galt, who was now back in London, tells us that "various surmises to stimulate curiosity were circulated," and he continues:

> "I do not say that these were by his orders or under his directions, but on one occasion I did fancy that I could discern a touch of his own hand in a paragraph in the *Morning Post*, in which he was mentioned as having returned from an excursion into the interior of Africa; and when I alluded to it, my suspicion was confirmed by his embarrassment."

That is quite modern—one often reads similar paragraphs nowadays concerning the visits of novelists to the Engadine, or to Khartoum; and if Byron did not go quite so far as to speak publicly of

his forthcoming work as “a colossal undertaking,” he managed, without saying so, to convey the impression that that was what it was. He also contrived to have the proofs shown, as a great privilege, to the right people, and was careful to let the critics have advance copies with a view to notice on the day of publication. Dallas himself reviewed it before the day of publication, and was excused on the ground that his indiscretion had proved “a good advertisement.” The privileged women—Lady Caroline Lamb was among them—enchanted by the sentiment of the poem, boasted to the women who were not so privileged, and besought an introduction to the poet. “I must see him. I am dying to see him,” was Lady Caroline’s exclamation to Rogers. “He bites his nails,” Rogers maliciously warned her; but she persisted as vehemently as ever.

She was to see him presently, in circumstances and with consequences which we shall have to note. In the meantime many striking stories concerning him were floating about for her to hear. She heard, for instance—or one may suppose her to have heard—of that dinner-party at Rogers’ house at which Byron distinguished himself by his abstemiousness, refused soup, and fish, and mutton, and wine, asked for hard biscuits and soda-water, and, when Rogers confessed himself unable to provide these delicacies, “dined upon potatoes bruised down upon his plate and drenched with vinegar.” Let us hope that she never heard the end of the story which proceeds, in “Table Talk of Samuel Rogers”: “I did not then know, what I now know to be a fact, that Byron, after leaving my house, had gone to a Club in Saint James’s Street and eaten a hearty meat-supper.” And, of course, her interest, like the interest of the rest of the world, was stimulated by Byron’s maiden speech in the House of

Lords.

Galt says quite bluntly that "there was a degree of worldly management in making his first appearance in the House of Lords so immediately preceding the publication of his poem." Most probably there was. When so many logs were rolling, this particular log was hardly likely to be left unrolled; and there is no denying that the note of self-advertisement does sound in the speech quite as loudly as the note of sympathy with the common people—those Nottingham rioters and frame-breakers for whose suppression it was proposed to legislate.

Viewed as a contribution to the debate, the speech does more credit to the speaker's heart than to his head. The appeal for pity for misguided, labouring men is mixed up with a denunciation of labour-saving appliances as devices for the further impoverishment of the poor. An economist might say a good deal about that if this were the place for saying it. Byron, such a one would point out, was a Radical by instinct, but a Radical who had as yet but an imperfect comprehension of the natural laws most favourable to the production, distribution, and exchange of wealth. But let that pass. The most resounding note of the speech is, after all, the note of the new man presenting himself, and explaining who he is, and what he has done:

> "I have traversed the seat of war in the Peninsular, I have been in some of the most oppressed provinces in Turkey; but never under the most despotic of infidel governments did I behold such squalid wretchedness," &c. &c. &c.

That, in the days in which travel was really travel,

involving adventure and bestowing unique experience, was the sort of utterance to draw attention. Byron had actually been to the places which other people only talked and read about; and he was no bronzed, maimed, or wrinkled veteran, but a youth with curling hair, a marble brow, a pallid face, a godlike aspect. What havoc must he not have wrought in harems, and in the hearts of odalisques! He was so young, so handsome, so clever—and, according to his own account, so wicked. And he had written a poem, it appeared—a poem as wicked and beautiful as himself, explaining, with all kinds of delightful details, the shocking courses into which he had been driven by disappointed love. However much poetry one left unread, one must read that poem, and read it at once, in order to show that one was "in the movement."

So the women argued. It did not matter to them that Byron lacked the graces of the natural orator, and declaimed his sentiments in a monotonous sing-song tone, like a public schoolboy on a speech-day. It mattered still less to them whether his economics were sound or shaky. Sympathy, not argument, was what they wanted, and the sympathy was there. Byron would be some one to lionise—some one, it might be, to love—some one, at any rate, whom every woman must try to understand. And the first step towards understanding him must be to read his book.

They read it, and made the men read it too. It was recognised, as such things come to be recognised, that any one who had not read it would be liable to feel foolish wherever the "best" people were gathered together. The first edition, issued on March 10, 1812, was sold out in three days. There was a

second edition in April, a third in June, a fourth in September, a fifth in December, a sixth in August 1813, a seventh in February 1814. By 1819, an eleventh edition had been reached; and the subsequent editions would require a professional statistician to count them. Byron, in short, had not only, as he said, "woke up one morning and found himself famous"; his fame had proved to have enduring qualities.

The suddenness of the fame, as we have seen, was not solely the result either of accident or of merit. Author, publisher, and literary agent—for Dallas may fairly be ranked with the pioneers of the last-named profession—had planned and plotted for it. It may even be questioned whether such supreme success was quite deserved; and it would be easy to cite examples of much greater work—some of Wordsworth's, for example—which was far less successful. But that the enthusiasm was natural—and indeed almost inevitable—cannot be disputed.

The title helped, as Byron himself recognised with cheerful cynicism. Lords, of course, had tried their hands at poetry before, but never with much success, whether they were good lords or wicked. Their compositions had amounted to little more than ingenious exercises in rhyme. Either they had failed to put their personalities into their poems or they had had no personalities worth speaking of to put into them. One could say that, with varying degrees of truth, of Rochester, Roscommon, Sheffield, and Carlisle. To find a lord whose poems could be taken seriously one had to go back to the Elizabethan ages; and modern readers—especially the women among them—were not very fond of going back so far. To get real poetry, with a real personality behind it,

from a lord was “phenomenal,” like getting figs from thistles—a thing to stand still and take note of.

Note, therefore, was taken—the more carefully, perhaps, because Byron was, as it were, an unknown lord, born and brought up in exile, coming into society with something of the air of one who had to break down barriers in order to claim his birthright. His poem was, in a manner, his weapon of assault; and, whatever else might be said about it, it was, in no case mere exercise in metrical composition. It was the manifesto of a new personality.

An immature personality, no doubt—in these two cantos of “Childe Harold” the essential Byron is not yet revealed. A personality, too, it might be, with a good deal of paste board theatricality about it—sincerity and clarity of insight were later Byronic developments. But that did not matter—least of all did it matter to the women. Melodrama is often more instantaneously effective than drama; and “twopence coloured” has obvious immediate advantages over “penny plain.” The pose might be apparent, but it was not ridiculous—or, at all events, it did not strike people as being so; and the power of posing without making himself ridiculous is one of the tests of a man’s value. Moreover no pose which makes an impression is ever entirely insincere. The great posturer must put a good deal of himself into his postures, just as the great painter puts a good deal of himself into his pictures. Matter-of-fact persons like Hobhouse might not think so; but women, with their surer instinct, know better. Hobhouse, glancing at the manuscript of “Childe Harold,” might say, with perfect candour, that he saw no points in that poem different from any other poem; but to the women it was, and was bound to be, a revelation.

A revelation, too, of just such a personality as the women liked to think that they understood—and with just such gaps in the revelation as they liked to be puzzled by! One may almost say that the hearts of Englishwomen went out with a rush to Byron for the same reason for which the hearts of the Frenchwomen, two generations earlier, had gone out to Rousseau—because he gave them sentiment in place of gallantry. He had, in fact, given them both; but the note of sentiment predominated; and it was easy to believe that the sentiment was sincere, and the gallantry merely the consoling pastime of the stricken heart.

The women took that view, as they were bound to, agreeing that Byron was the most interesting man of their age and generation. He certainly was infinitely more interesting, from their point of view, than Rousseau. He was younger, better born, and better looking, with more distinguished manners—one of themselves and not, like Jean-Jacques, a promoted lackey. So, in a day and a night, they made him famous, and ensured that, whatever else his career might be, it should be spectacular. The world, in short, was placed, in a sudden instant, at his feet. It was open to him to stand with his foot on its neck, striking attitudes—to step at a stride into a notable position in public life, or to ride, in his own way, with his own haste, to the devil.

Or, at all events, it seemed open to him to make this choice, though the actual course of his life in the presence of the apparent choice, might well be cited as an object lesson in the distinction which the philosophers have drawn between the freedom to do as we will, and the freedom to will as we will. Which is to say that the spectacular life, in his case as in so

many others, was to be at the mercy of the inner life, and the things seen in it were largely to be the effect of causes which were out of sight.

It is to that inner life, and to those invisible causes of visible effects that we must now turn back.

CHAPTER X

THE SECRET ORCHARD

The invisible force which was beginning to influence Byron's life, and was presently to deflect it, was a revival of his recollections of Mary Chaworth. He nowhere tells us so, nor do his biographers on his behalf, but the fact is none the less quite certain. The proofs abound, though the name is never mentioned in them; and Mr. Richard Edgecumbe has marshalled them[6] with conclusive force. The course which Byron's life followed—the things which he willed and did, as well as the things he said—can only be explained if Mary Chaworth is once more brought into the story.

She is, it must be admitted, one of the most shadowy and elusive of all heroines of romance. We have hardly a scrap of her handwriting—hardly a definite report about her from any contemporary witness. She

is said to have been disposed to flirt before her marriage, but to have been serious and well-conducted afterwards. It is known that her husband was unkind to her and that she was unhappy with him; there are statements that she was “religious”; but most of the other evidence is negative, leaving the impression that she was commonplace. The secret of her charm, that is to say, is lost; and we can only guess at it—each of us guessing differently because something of ourselves has to go to the framing of the guesses.

Assuredly there is no inference unfavourable to her charm to be drawn from the fact that she passed through the world without cutting a figure in it. The women who dazzle the world are rarely the women for whose love men count the world well lost. It has been written that a man could no more fall in love with Mrs. Siddons than with the Pyramid of Cheops. Men have also refrained, as a rule, from falling in love with the brilliant women of the *salons*—with Madame du Deffand, for instance, and Madame Necker, and Lady Blessington, and Lady Holland. The qualities of a hostess, they have felt, are different from those of a mistress. Such women can dominate the crowd, wearing their tiaras like queens, in the garish light of fashionable assemblies; but, in the twilight of the secret orchard, their empire crumbles to the dust. It is not given to them to make any man feel that the limitations of time and space have ceased and that the whole of life is concentrated in the life lived here and now. The women who possess that power are the women who seem insignificant to the men to whom they have not revealed themselves.

Mary Chaworth possessed that power, and so left no mark anywhere in life except on Byron’s heart. She

was quite undistinguished, and seemingly conventional—the last woman in the world to be likely to throw her bonnet over the windmill; but she had this subtle, indefinable, and inexplicable secret. She had had it even in the irresponsible days when she flirted with the fat boy, but failed to divine his genius, and preferred the hard-riding and hard-drinking squire. She retained it when the fox-hunting squire had shown the coarseness of his fibre, and the fat boy was a man whose genius had proved itself. Every meeting, therefore, was bound to bring a renewal of the spell, even though, in the intervals between the meetings, Byron could forget.

We have it, on Byron's authority, that there were certain "stolen meetings." It has been assumed that these were prior to Mary Chaworth's marriage; but that is hardly credible. There was no need for stolen meetings then; for everything was frank and open. They must have taken place, if at all—and there is no reason to doubt that they did take place—subsequently to the marriage: subsequently to that dinner-party at which Byron and Mary met, and were embarrassed, and did not know what to say to each other. Perhaps, since Mary was a woman whose instinct it was to walk in the straight path, there was no conscious and deliberate secrecy. The more likely assumption, indeed, is that they contrived to meet by accident, and then thought it better, without any definite exchange of promises, not to mention that they had met. However that may be, the spell continued, and Mary kept the key of the secret orchard. Her spirit was certain to revisit it, even if she herself did not.

Then came the long Eastern pilgrimage. The feeling that this sort of thing could not go on indefinitely

may very well have been one of the motives for it; and Byron, of course, was quite young enough to forget, and a great deal too young to let past memories divert his mind from present pleasures. He did forget—or very nearly so; he did divert himself as opportunity occurred. He enjoyed his battle with the police for a woman of the town; he enjoyed his passion for a married woman. There is no reason whatever to suppose that he was really thinking of Mary Chaworth when he wrote verses to the Maid of Athens, or when he gave the most precious of his rings to Mrs. Spencer Smith. But the secret orchard always remained; the spirit of the old tenant might at any time return to it. Such spirits always do return whenever life suddenly, for whatever reason, seems a blank.

It was, in this instance, death—a rapid series of deaths—that brought it back. Byron's mother died, in circumstances for which, as we have seen, he had some reason to reproach himself. His choirboy friend Eddleston pined away from consumption. Charles Skinner Matthews was drowned in the Cam—entangled in the river weeds and sucked under. Wingfield was drowned on his way to the war in Spain. The news of these four deaths came almost simultaneously, and the shock broke down Byron's high spirits. His letters are very heartbroken and eloquent.

"Some curse," he wrote to Scrope Davies, the gamester, "hangs over me and mine.... Come to me, Scrope; I am almost desolate—left almost alone in the world." "At three-and-twenty," he wrote to Dallas, "I am left alone, and what more can we be at seventy? It is true I am young enough to begin again, but with whom can I retrace the laughing part of my

life?" To Dallas, too, he wrote a certain morbid letter about the four skulls which lay on his study table, and in another letter to Hodgson he says:

> "The blows followed each other so rapidly that I am yet stupid from the shock; and though I do eat, and drink, and talk, and even laugh at times, yet I can hardly persuade myself that I am awake, did not every morning convince me mournfully to the contrary. I shall now waive the subject, the dead are at rest, and none but the dead can be so.... I am solitary, and I never felt solitude irksome before."

The consolations which Hodgson offered him in his distress were those of religion. He wrote him long letters concerning the immortality of the soul; letters which caused Byron, years afterwards, to remark, when his friend had taken orders, that Hodgson was always pious, "even when he was kept by a washerwoman"—and was shocked by his blasphemous reply that he did not believe in immortality and did not desire it. He appealed to Byron—"for God's sake"—to pull himself together and read Paley's "Evidences of Christianity." He had a great respect for Paley as a Senior Wrangler and entertained no doubt that his conclusions followed from his premisses. A little later, he and Harness,[7] one of Byron's Harrow protégés, who was then at Cambridge, reading for his degree, went down to Newstead to stay with Byron.

There were no orgies there this time. No "Paphian girls" were introduced; no practical jokes were played; the cook and the housemaid remained in the servants' quarters. "Nothing," says Harness, "could

have been more orderly than the course of our days"—which was right and proper seeing that both he and Hodgson were shortly going to be ordained. If the trio sat up late, it was only to talk about literature and religion. Hodgson pressed orthodox views on Byron with "judicious zeal and affectionate earnestness." Harness supported him with the diffidence appropriate to his tender years. Byron maintained his own point of view, while thinking of other things.

Chiefly he thought of the ghost which now revisited his secret orchard, telling himself that it was not the ghost but the real woman which should have been there. With Mary Chaworth alone he had known the sensation that nothing else mattered while he and she were together. Now that so many deaths had made a solitude in his heart he sorely needed the renewal of that feeling. She could have vouchsafed it to him; she both could and should. Why then, was she not at Annesley, waiting for him, granting more stolen interviews, proving that she still cared, affording him that escape from life to ecstasy?

That was the drift of Byron's thoughts at the time when Hodgson was trying to direct his attention to Paley's "Evidences." He saw, as youth is apt to do, more possibilities of comfort in love than in theology —a fact which is the less to be wondered at seeing that the theology in which he had been brought up was of the uncomfortable Calvinistic kind; and though he was the victim of a mood rather than of a passion—for passion needed the stimulus of sight and touch—the mood had to be expressed, and perhaps worked off, in verse. It burst into "Childe Harold":

"*Thou too art gone, thou loved and lovely one!*
Whom Youth and Youth's affections bound to me;
Who did for me what none beside have done,
Nor shrank from one albeit unworthy thee.
What is my Being! thou has ceased to be!
Nor staid to welcome here thy wanderer home,
Who mourns o'er hours which we no more shall see—
Would they had never been, or were to come!
Would he had ne'er returned to find fresh cause to roam.

"*Oh, ever loving, lovely, and beloved!*
How selfish Sorrow ponders on the past.
And clings to thoughts now better far removed!
But Time shall tear thy shadow from me last.
All thou couldst have of mine, stern Death, thou hast;
The Parent, Friend, and now the more than Friend,
Ne'er yet for one thine arrows flew so fast,
And grief with grief continuing still to blend,
Hath snatched the little joy that Life hath yet to lend."

These stanzas, with three others, were sent to Dallas after "Childe Harold" was in the press, together with a letter which must have mystified him though, as a "poor relation," he would not well ask impertinent questions; a letter to the effect that Byron has "supped full of horrors" and "become callous" and "has not a tear left." The "Thyrza" sequence of poems belongs to the same period—almost to the same day. They have puzzled many generations of editors and commentators because "Thyrza" is addressed in them as one who is dead, and because,

though Byron spoke of Thyrza to his friends as a real person and showed a lock of her hair, no trace of any woman answering to her description can be discovered in any chronicle of his life.

The explanation is that Thyrza was not really dead, though Byron chose so to write of her. Thyrza was Mary Chaworth who was dead to Byron in the sense that she had passed out of his life, as he had every reason to think (though he thought wrongly) for ever. The poems expressed, according to Moore, "the essence, the abstract spirit, as it were, of many griefs," with which was mingled the memory of her who "though living was for him as much lost as" any of the dead friends for whom he mourned. They expressed, in fact, his despair at finding the secret orchard tenanted only by a ghost; and if we read the poems by the light of that clue, we can get a clear meaning out of every line.

They are too long to be quoted. Readers must refer to them and judge. The note is the note of bitter despair, working up, at the end, into the note of recklessness. The contrast is there—that contrast as old as the world—between the things that are and the things that might, and should, have been; and then there follows the declaration that, as things are what they are, and as their consequences will be what they will be, there is nothing for it but to plunge into pleasure, albeit with the full knowledge that pleasure cannot please:

> "*One struggle more, and I am free*
> *From pangs that rend my heart in twain;*
> *One last long sigh to Love and thee,*
> *Then back to busy life again.*
> *It suits me well to mingle now*

With things that never pleased before:
Though every joy is fled below,
What future grief can touch me more?

"*Then bring me wine, the banquet bring;*
Man was not formed to live alone:
I'll be that light unmeaning thing
That smiles with all, and weeps with none.
It was not thus in days more dear,
It never would have been, but thou
Hast fled, and left me lonely here;
Thou'rt nothing,—all are nothing now."

The so-called Byronic pose challenges us in that passage; but it is by no means as a pose that it must be dismissed. The men who seem to pose are very often just the men who have the courage—or the bravado, if any one prefers the word—to be sincere; and Byron, if he is to be rightly understood, must be thought of as the most sincere man who ever struck an attitude. That was the secret of his strength. Pose was for him just what Aristotle, as interpreted by Professor Bywater, says that the spectacle of tragedy is to the mass of the spectators. It purged him, for the time being, of his emotions by indulging them. The pose, having done its work, ceased until the emotions recurred, and then he posed again. Hence the many differences of opinion among his friends as to whether he posed or not.

Just now he was posing, in all sincerity, not only to himself but to Hodgson. At one time he told Hodgson that, as soon as he had set his affairs in order, he should "leave England for ever." At another he sent him an "Epistle to a Friend in Answer to some Lines exhorting the Author to be cheerful and to 'banish Care.'" Hodgson sent them to Moore for publication

in his Life, requesting that the concluding lines should not be printed; but Moore disregarded the request. The Epistle ended thus:

> "*But let this pass—I'll whine no more.*
> *Nor seek again an Eastern shore;*
> *The world befits a busy brain,—*
> *I'll hie me to its haunts again.*
> *But if, in some succeeding year,*
> *When Britain's "May is in the sere,"*
> *Thou hear'st of one, whose deepening crimes*
> *Suit with the sablest of the times,*
> *Of one, whom love nor pity sways,*
> *Nor hope of fame, nor good men's praise;*
> *One, who in stern Ambition's pride,*
> *Perchance not blood shall turn aside:*
> *One ranked in some recording page*
> *With the worst anarchs of the age,*
> *Him wilt thou* know,—*and* knowing *pause,*
> *Nor with the effect forget the cause.*"

The allusion here, as Hodgson's biographer discerns, is to "his early disappointment in love as the source of all his subsequent sorrow." Hodgson's own comment, scrawled in the margin of the manuscript is: "N.B.—The poor dear soul meant nothing of all this."

He meant it—and yet he did not mean it. It was the emphasised and exaggerated expression of what he meant—momentarily emphasised for the purpose, whether conscious or unconscious, of relieving himself from the black mood which had descended on him. The relief was gained—though it was not to be permanent. He did not "leave England for ever"—not yet—but hied him to the haunts of the world as he had promised. He plunged into pleasure—and

found pleasure more pleasant than he had imagined that it could be.

That was inevitable. He was only twenty-four, and he was famous; and "to be famous when one is young—that is the dream of the gods." Moreover, he was achieving just that sort of fame which is attended by the most intoxicating joy. The fame of the man of science is nothing—the world interests itself in his discovery but not in him. The fame of a statesman is hardly sweeter—it is only won by fighting and working hard and making jealous enemies. The fame of a poet—a poet who is also *the* poet—brings instantaneously the applause of men and the wonder and homage of women. They do not separate the man from his work, but insist on associating him with it. Beautiful women as well as blue-stockings—and with less critical discrimination than blue-stockings—prostrate and abase themselves before him, competing for the sunshine of his smiles, believing, or affecting to believe, that his and theirs are kindred souls.

So it befell Byron. Born in exile, he had at last returned from exile in a blaze of triumph. All the doors of all the best houses were thrown open to him with a blare of trumpets. He entered them, not as a parvenu, like Moore the Irish grocer's son, but as the one man without whose presence the festival would have been incomplete. No man, if one might judge by externals, had ever a better chance of making a splendid and noble pageant of his life. So far as an observer could judge—so far probably as he himself knew—the ghosts of the past were laid, and its memories in a fair way of being effaced. If the past had not come back to him, he might have forgotten it. The tragedy of his life was that it did come back—

that he did meet Mary Chaworth again and rediscover the secret orchard which, while she was absent from it, was a howling wilderness, overgrown with weeds.

But not quite immediately. There were certain other things which had to happen first.

CHAPTER XI

LADY CAROLINE LAMB

The record of Byron's social triumphs may be outlined in a few sentences.

Without quite losing sight of such old friends as Hodgson and Harness, he moved, with the air of a social conqueror in three new sets, which may be regarded as distinct, though there were points at which they touched each other. Among men of letters his chief friends were Samuel Rogers, the banker poet, then a man verging on fifty, whose superlative dinner we have seen him refusing to eat, and Thomas Moore, who had made his acquaintance by demanding satisfaction for an alleged affront in "English Bards," which Byron had explained away. At the same time he "got on very well," as he tells us, with Beau Brummell and the other dandies, being

one of the three men of letters who were admitted to Watiers, and was lionised in the society which we should nowadays describe as “smart.”

It has been written that the roadway opposite to his apartments was blocked by liveried footmen conveying perfumed notes. That, we may take it, is a picturesque exaggeration; but, no doubt, he received more invitations than the laws of time and space allowed him to accept—most of them, though by no means all of them, to the great Whig houses. Lady Westmorland, Lady Jersey, Lady Holland, and Lady Melbourne were the most fashionable of the hostesses who competed for the privilege of his company; and Lady Melbourne had a daughter-in-law—Lady Caroline Lamb. She also had a niece—Miss Anna Isabella Milbanke; but it is of Lady Caroline Lamb that we must speak first.

Lady Caroline was three years older than Byron. She was the daughter of the third Earl of Bessborough, and the wife of William Lamb, who, as Lord Melbourne, afterwards became Prime Minister of England. It was a matter of opinion whether she was beautiful; it was also a matter of opinion whether she was sane—doctors consulted on that branch of the subject had returned doubtful, non-committal answers. She was not exactly mad, they said, but she was of a temperament allied to madness. She must not be pressed to study, but must be allowed to run wild and do as she liked.

She had run wild, for years, reading the works of Burns, which are not written for the young, and galloping about parks on bare-backed steeds, imagining the world about her instead of realising it, and, of course, imagining it wrong. It is on record

that she believed that bread-and-butter was a natural product and that horses were fed on beef; also that she divided the community into two classes—dukes and beggars—and supposed that the former would always, by some law of nature, remain wealthy, whatever they did with their money. Her charm—and she could be very charming when she liked—was that of a high-spirited, irresponsible, wilful, wayward child. She was, in short, the kind of girl whom those who loved her best would describe, in the vernacular, as “a handful.”



Lady Caroline Lamb.

"Of all the Devonshire House girls," William Lamb had said, "that is the one for me." That was when she was thirteen; and six years later he was still of the same opinion. He was confirmed in it when she refused his offer of marriage, proposing instead to run away with him in boy's clothes and act as his secretary. He accepted neither his dismissal nor her

alternative suggestion, but persevered in his suit until he was accepted. The next thing that happened was that Lady Caroline broke into railing accusations against the bishop who performed the marriage rites, tore her wedding dress to tatters, and had to be carried to her carriage in a fainting fit. It was not a very auspicious commencement of married life, but one which prepares us for the general reflections on marriage found in her husband's common-place book, recently edited by Mr. Lloyd Sanders:

> "The general reason against marriage is that two minds, however congenial they may be, or however submissive the one may be to the other, can never act like one. It is the nature of human beings that no man can be free or independent...."
>
> "... By marriage you place yourself on the defensive instead of the offensive in society...."
>
> "Every man will find his own private affairs more difficult to control than any public affairs on which he may be engaged...."

William Lamb's experience of married life was to be, as it were, an object lesson on those texts. At one moment Lady Caroline was to overwhelm him with doting affection; at the next to make him ridiculous. Sometimes the two moods followed each other as quickly as the thunder follows the lightning, as in the case of a scene of which the Kembles were involuntary witnesses when staying in the same hotel with the Lambs in Paris.

Husband and wife had quarrelled in their presence, and had then withdrawn to their apartment which

faced the rooms which the Kembles occupied. The lamps were lighted, and the blinds were not drawn, so that the Kembles looked across the courtyard and saw what happened. William Lamb was in his arm-chair. Lady Caroline first sat on his knee, and then slid to his feet, looking up into his face with great humility. This for a few moments. Then something that William Lamb said once more disturbed Lady Caroline's equanimity. In an instant she was on her feet, running round the room, pursued by her husband, sweeping mirrors, candlesticks, and crockery on to the floor, in a veritable whirlwind of passion; whereupon William Lamb drew the blind and the Kembles saw no more.

That story may serve as a symbolic epitome of William Lamb's married life. We shall come to many stories of the same kind as we proceed. Lady Caroline was a creature of impulse, and there was nearly always a man in the case. She easily persuaded herself that any man who was polite to her was in love with her—both Moore and Rogers were among the victims of whom she boasted—and she would not allow the contrary to be suggested. Moreover, besides being self-willed in matters of the heart, she liked to *afficher* herself with every man for whom she felt a preference, and to declare the state of her affections to the world with the insistent emphasis with which the sensational virtues of soaps and sauces are set forth on the hoardings.

Whether she deliberately sought notoriety, or merely did what she chose to do without fear of it, remains, to this hour, an open question. All that is certain is that she did, in fact, make herself very notorious indeed, and that there was more scandal than subtlety in her attempts to monopolise Byron, to

whose heart she laid siege, with all the audacity of a stage adventuress, in the presence of a large, amused, and interested audience.

It was Lady Westmorland who introduced them. She did not introduce Byron to Lady Caroline, but Lady Caroline to Byron. Already, only a few days after the appearance of "Childe Harold," he was on his pedestal, and was not expected to descend from it, even to show deference to ladies. "He has a club-foot and bites his nails," Rogers had told her. "If he is as ugly as Æsop I must know him," she had answered. But now that she was brought to him, she shrank from him, whether because she was afraid, or because she wished to provoke and pique him. "I looked earnestly at him," she told Lady Morgan, "and turned on my heel"; and she went home and wrote in her diary the impression that Byron was "mad, bad, and dangerous to know."

That was the first scene in the comedy. The second took place at Holland House, and the third at Melbourne House. Lady Caroline's recollections of them were recorded in Lady Morgan's reminiscences:

> "I was sitting with Lord and Lady Holland when he was announced. Lady Holland said, 'I must present Lord Byron to you.' Lord Byron said, 'That offer was made to you before; may I ask why you rejected it?' He begged permission to come and see me. He did so the next day. Rogers and Moore were standing by me: I had just come in from riding. I was filthy and heated. When Lord Byron was announced, I flew out of the room to wash myself. When I returned, Rogers said, 'Lord Byron, you are a happy man. Lady

> Caroline has been sitting here in all her dirt with us, but when you were announced, she flew to beautify herself.' Lord Byron wished to come and see me at eight o'clock, when I was alone. I said he might."

He did; and "from that moment for more than nine months he almost lived at Melbourne House." The rest, in Lady Caroline's opinion—at all events in one of her opinions, expressed in an angry letter—was all William Lamb's fault.

> "He cared nothing for my morals," she remarks. "I might flirt and go about with what men I pleased. He was privy to my affair with Lord Byron and laughed at it. His indolence renders him insensible to everything. When I ride, play, and amuse him, he loves me. In sickness and suffering he deserts me."

That protest, however, is wholly unjust, and only partly true. A married woman who has no sooner met a man than she arranges to dine *tête-à-tête* with him is hardly entitled to ascribe her flirtation to her husband's contributory negligence. Lady Caroline not only did that, but also, in her wilful way, plunged at once into a compromising correspondence. Her very first letter to Byron, according to Rogers, "assured him that, if he was in any want of money, all her jewels were at his disposal." In another letter of approximately the same date we find her writing: "The rose Lord Byron gave Lady Caroline Lamb died in despite of every effort made to save it; probably from regret at its fallen fortunes."

Evidently Lady Caroline had thrown herself at Byron's head before William Lamb guessed what was

happening. Afterwards, no doubt, he knew what the rest of the world knew. But he also knew—what the rest of the world did not know, and what Lady Caroline herself only imperfectly realised—how froward and changeable were his wife's moods, how great was the risk of hysterical explosions if those moods were crossed, what a "handful" she was, in short, and how very difficult it was to handle her, and so he left things alone.

Leaving things alone, indeed, was William Lamb's regular formula for the solution of the problems alike of public and of private life. He believed that problems left alone tended to solve themselves, just as letters left unanswered tend to answer themselves. On the whole the principle had worked, if not ideally, yet well enough for the practical purposes of domestic life. Things had happened before, and, being left alone, had ceased to happen. In his desk lay a letter relating to some previous ebullition the particulars of which are wrapped in mystery. "I think lately, my dearest William," Lady Caroline had written, three years before, "we have been very troublesome to each other." It was true, and it had not mattered. The fire, if there had been a fire, had burnt itself out. The hysterics—it is not to be doubted that there were hysterics—had subsided with the passing of the occasion which had called them forth. The clouds had been dispersed, and the sun had shone again. Why should not this chapter in his domestic history repeat itself? He was very fond of his wife; he hated rows; he wished to take no risks. The best way of avoiding risks was to humour her.

So he humoured her, remembering how she had railed at the bishop on her wedding day, knowing,

no doubt, how little a thing might upset her mental balance, and making every possible allowance; and the only attempt at intervention came from Lady Melbourne, who remonstrated, not with Lady Caroline, but with Byron. He struck an attitude, and waived the matter on one side.

> "You need not fear me," was his reply. "I do not pursue pleasure like other men; I labour under an incurable disease and a blighted heart. Believe me she is safe with me."

No one knows whether she was, in the narrow sense of the word, "safe" with him or not. Rogers thought that she was, but admitted that he did not really know. In any case she was not safe from herself, or from the tongue of scandal. She was really in love—her devotion was no passing fancy—and she did not care who knew it. Indeed she behaved as if she thought that the more people who knew it, the better. The woman who, at a ball, called upon Byron's friend Harness—that very serious young Cantab just about to take orders—to bear witness that she was wearing no fewer than six pairs of stockings, was not likely to hide the light of a grand passion under a bushel. She did not so hide it, but proceeded, as has been said, to *afficher* herself as if she were inviting the attention of the world to a great spectacular entertainment. She had not known Byron a couple of months before people were beginning to talk.

> "Your little friend Caro William," wrote the Duchess of Devonshire on May 4, 1812, "as usual is doing all sorts of imprudent things with him.... 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. I should not be surprised if Caro William were to go with him, she is so wild and imprudent."

Rogers, in his "Table Talk," is still more picturesque. He tells us how, when Byron and Lady Caroline quarrelled, she used to plant herself in his (Rogers') garden, waiting to catch him on his return home and beg him to effect a reconciliation; and he continues:

> "When she met Byron at a party, she would always, if possible, return home from it in *his* carriage, and accompanied by *him*: I recollect particularly their returning to town together from Holland House. But such was the insanity of her passion for Byron that sometimes, when not invited to a party where he was to be, she would wait for him in the street till it was over! One night, after a great party at Devonshire House, to which Lady Caroline had not been invited, I saw her—yes, saw her—talking to Byron, with half of her body thrust into the carriage which he had just entered."

In the midst of, and in consequence of, these spectacles, Lady Melbourne decided to take Lady Caroline to Ireland. She cherished, it seems, the double design of getting her daughter-in-law out of Byron's way and marrying Byron to her niece. Of the success of the latter scheme there will be a good deal to be said in subsequent chapters. Much was to happen, however, both to Byron and to Lady Caroline before it succeeded. They continued to correspond during Lady Caroline's absence; and the correspondence soon reached an acute phase which

resulted in a series of violent scenes.

CHAPTER XII

THE QUARREL WITH LADY CAROLINE—HER CHARACTER AND SUBSEQUENT CAREER

"While in Ireland," Lady Caroline Lamb told Lady Morgan, "I received letters constantly—the most tender and the most amusing."

She received one letter in which Byron, after speaking of "a sense of duty to your husband and mother" declared that "no other in word or deed shall ever hold the place in my affections which is, and shall be, most sacred to you," and concluded: "I was and am yours freely and most entirely, to obey, to honour, love—and fly with you when, where, and how you yourself *might* and *may* determine." What did he mean?

Apparently he meant to let Lady Caroline down gently—to give her the right of boasting of his undying regard—and to obtain his liberty in exchange. We need not stop to consider whether the bargain would have been a fair one, for Lady Caroline did not agree to it. There were no bounds to

her infatuation, and she could not bear the thought that there should be any bounds to his. But there were. "Even during our intimacy," he told Medwin, "I was not at all constant to this fair one, and she suspected as much." It looks as though her suspicions decided her to return to England. At all events she started, and at Dublin, received another letter to which the epithets "tender" and "amusing" were equally inapplicable.

"It was," she told Lady Morgan, "that cruel letter I have published in 'Glenarvon'"—the novel in which, some five years later, she gave the world her version of the liaison. The text of it, as given in 'Glenarvon,' is as follows:

> "I am no longer your lover; and since you oblige me to confess it by this truly unfeminine persecution, learn that I am attached to another, whose name it would, of course, be dishonest to mention. I shall ever remember with gratitude the many instances I have received of the predilection you have shown in my favour. I shall ever continue your friend, if your ladyship will permit me so to style myself. And as a first proof of my regard, I offer you this advice: correct your vanity, which is ridiculous: exert your absurd caprices on others; and leave me in peace."

Byron appears to have admitted to Medwin that "a part" of the letter was genuine. The rest of it—the gratuitously offensive part of it—was doubtless doctored, if not actually fabricated, by the novelist for the purposes of her art. In any case, however, quite enough was written to send Lady Caroline into a fit, from which she only recovered to renew her

eccentricities. “I lost my brain,” she confesses. “I was bled, leeched; kept for a month in the filthy Dolphin Inn at Rock. On my return I was in great prostration of mind and spirit.” And then scenes followed—scene on the heels of scene. It is impossible to be quite sure of arranging them in their proper order; but that matters little.

There was a scene in Brocket Park, where Lady Caroline burnt Byron in effigy. Together with his effigy she burnt copies of his letters, keeping the originals for reference. A number of girls, attired in white, danced round the pyre, chanting a dirge which she had composed for the occasion:

> “*Is this Guy Faux you burn in effigy?*
> *Why bring the Traitor here? What is Guy Faux to me?*
> *Guy Faux betrayed his country, and his laws.*
> *England revenged the wrong; his was a public cause.*
> *But I have private cause to raise this flame.*
> *Burn also those, and be their fate the same.*”

And also:

> “*Burn, fire, burn, while wondering Boys exclaim,*
> *And gold and trinkets glitter in the flame.*
> *Ah! look not thus on me, so grave, so sad;*
> *Shake not your heads, nor say the Lady’s mad.*”

Et cetera.

Then there was a scene in Byron’s chambers, whither Lady Caroline pursued him in order to obtain confirmation of certain suspicions, thus described by Byron to Medwin:

> "In order to detect my intrigues she watched me, and earthed a lady into my lodgings—and came herself, terrier-like, in the disguise of a carman. My valet, who did not see through the masquerade, let her in: when to the despair of Fletcher, she put off the man and put on the woman. Imagine the scene! It was worthy of Faublas!"

After that, according to Medwin, it was agreed that, if they met, they were to meet as strangers; but Lady Caroline did not carry out her part of the agreement. "We were at a ball," the reporter represents Byron as saying. "She came up and asked me if she might waltz. I thought it perfectly indifferent whether she waltzed or not, or with whom, and told her so, in different terms, but with much coolness. After she had finished, a scene occurred, which was in the mouths of everyone." Fanny Kemble, however, gives a more sensational version of the story.

"Lady Caroline," she says, "with impertinent disregard of Byron's infirmity, asked him to waltz. He contemptuously replied, 'I cannot, and you nor any other woman ought not.'" Whereupon, the narrator continues, Lady Caroline rushed into the dressing-room, threw up the window, and tried to throw herself out of it, exclaiming with Saint-Preux: "*La roche est escarpée; l'eau est profonde!*" Then, saved by someone who saw her intention and caught hold of her skirts, she asked for water, bit a piece out of the glass which was handed to her, and tried to stab herself with it, but was ultimately persuaded to return home and go to bed.

Fact and fancy, no doubt, are inextricably woven together in that narrative. All that is quite certain is

that Lady Caroline did go home, and that her temper became so ungovernable that William Lamb, who also, in spite of his easy-going ways, had a temper, proposed a separation. The proposal was agreed to, and the family lawyer was instructed to draw up the deed. He drew it up; but when he brought it to the house to be signed, sealed, and delivered, he found Lady Caroline sitting on her husband's knee, "feeding him," says his biographer, "with tiny scraps of transparent bread and butter." His professional tact bade him retire before this unexpected tableau; and the separation was postponed for twelve years.

That is practically the whole of the story, so far as Byron is concerned with it. Lady Caroline was to write him other letters to which it will be necessary to refer as we proceed; but she had now passed out of his life, even if he had not passed out of hers. Other urgent interests were springing up to occupy him; and he had once more heard the *leit motif* for which we always have to listen when we find his actions, his letters, and his poems perplexing us.

Society—that is to say, the women of society—blamed him for his conduct; but the blame, if it is to have any sting in it, seems to require the assumption that every woman has a right to every man's heart if she demands it with sufficient emphasis, and that any man who refuses to honour the demand is, *ipso facto*, "behaving badly." Women, perhaps, are a little more ready to make that assumption than are philosophers to allow its validity. Granting the assumption, we shall be bound to admit that Byron did treat Lady Caroline shamefully; but suppose we do not grant it—then, perhaps, our chief task will be to search for excuses for Lady Caroline herself.

The excuses to which she is entitled are those which were very obviously made for her by her husband and his mother. They did not quarrel with her, though they sometimes lost their temper with her; and—what is more to the purpose—they did not quarrel with Byron. Evidently, therefore, they held the view that Lady Caroline was responsible for Byron's conduct—but could not be held responsible for her own. They had the doctor's word for it that, though she was not mad, she might easily become so. If she was to be kept sane, she must be humoured. In humouring her up to a point, Byron had acted for the best. Neither a husband nor a mother-in-law could blame him for his unwillingness to go beyond that point. His proposal to fly with her may strike one as excessive; but it may perhaps be classed with the promises sometimes made to passionate children in the hope of keeping them quiet till the passion passes. There is really no reason to think that either William Lamb or Lady Melbourne regarded it in any other light.

It was "really from the best motives," Byron assured Hodgson, that "I withdrew my homage." The best motives, as we shall perceive, were mixed with other motives; but they were doubtless there. Byron could justly speak of himself as "restoring a woman to her family, who are treating her with the greatest kindness, and with whom I am on good terms." It was only to be expected that he would be flattered by her attentions when he was twenty-four and new to society. It was equally to be expected that he should execute a retreat when he realised that he had to do with a *détraquée* whose pursuit at once threatened a scandal and made him as well as her husband look ridiculous.

The proofs that her mind was unhinged are ample. “She appears to me,” wrote Lady H. Leveson Gower to Lady G. Morpeth, “in a state very little short of insanity, and my aunt describes it as at times having been very decidedly so.” That is an example of the direct evidence; and the circumstantial evidence is even more abundant. The scene at the ball, of which Lady Caroline herself gave a spluttering account in a rambling and incoherent letter to Medwin, is only a part of it. An attempt which she made to forge Byron’s signature in order to obtain his portrait from John Murray points to the same conclusion. The inconsistent and inconsequential picture which she draws of herself in her letters and her writings affords the most conclusive testimony of all.

From the correspondence and other documents one could not possibly gather whether she preferred her husband to her lover or her lover to her husband; whether she “worshipped” Byron for three years only or throughout her life; whether her attachment to him ceased, or did not cease, after her visit, in men’s clothes, to his chambers; whether she did or did not rejoice in the unhappiness of his married life. On all these points she repeatedly contradicted herself with the excessive emphasis of the hysterical. To say that Byron’s treatment of her drove her mad would be to talk nonsense. At the most it only gave an illusion of method to her madness, and supplied the monomania for which her unbalanced mind was waiting.

William Lamb humoured her long after Byron had ceased to do so. She knew it, and, in her comparatively lucid intervals, appreciated both his forbearance and his character. “Remember,” she wrote to Lady Morgan, “the only noble fellow I ever

met with is William Lamb; he is to me what Shore was to Jane Shore." She also placed "William Lamb first" in the order of the objects of her affection; but, in the very letter in which she did so, she spoke of "Lord Byron, that dear, that angel, that misguided and misguiding Byron, whom I adore." We must make what we can of it; but, in truth, there is nothing to be made of it except that Lady Caroline was mad. Presently she became so obviously mad that she smashed her doctor's watch in a fit of rage and had to be placed in the charge of two female keepers.

There came a day when, riding near Brocket, she met a funeral procession, and was told that it was Byron's. Then she fainted; and it was after that incident that her uncontrollable violence caused the long-postponed separation to be carried into effect. Some verses which she wrote on the occasion are printed among Lord Melbourne's papers:

> "*Loved One! No tear is in mine eye,*
> *Though pangs my bosom thrill,*
> *For I have learned, when others sigh,*
> *To suffer and be still.*
> *Passion, and pride, and flattery strove,*
> *They made a wreck of me;*
> *But oh, I never ceased to love,*
> *I never loved but thee."*

There are two other—very similar—stanzas. The inadequacy of the expression is, perhaps, the most pathetic thing about them. A child seems to be struggling to utter the emotions of a grown-up person—a clouded mind, to be striving to clear itself under the influence of a sudden shock. And the mind in truth was, at that date, very far from clear. The

drinking of laudanum mixed with brandy often helped in the clouding of it; and the end was not very far removed.

The last illness began towards the end of 1827. William Lamb, when he heard of it, hurried to his wife's side; devoted to her, and eager to humour her, in spite of everything, to the last. She was "able to converse with him and enjoy his society," and he found her "calm, patient, and affectionate." She died of dropsy on January 28, 1828; and William Lamb published an article consecrated to her memory in the *Literary Gazette* in the course of the following month. One gathers from it, reading between the lines, not only that he forgave, but that he understood. Hopes, he admitted, had been drawn from her early years which "her maturity was not destined to realise"; but he concluded: "Her manners, though somewhat eccentric, and apparently, not really, affected, had a fascination which it is difficult for any who never encountered their effect to conceive."

All this, however, though not irrelevant, is taking us a long way from Byron, to whom it is now time to return.

CHAPTER XIII

LADY OXFORD—BYRON'S INTENTION OF GOING ABROAD WITH HER

Byron's separation from Lady Caroline Lamb, though suggested by Lady Melbourne, appears to have been negotiated by Hobhouse at the instance of Lady Bessborough. "Received a note from Lady Bessborough. Went to Byron, who agrees to go out of town," is the entry in his Diary which reveals the part he played. A further entry relating that Lady Caroline found him and Lady Bessborough together, and charged them with looking like conspirators, adds all the confirmation needed. Byron went out of town as he had promised, stayed at Cheltenham, and presently wrote the letter in which he told Lady Caroline that he had ceased to love her. He added insult to injury, as Lady Caroline felt, by writing on notepaper bearing the arms of the Countess of Oxford.

She and Lady Oxford knew each other rather well, and had been friends. "Lady Oxford and Caroline William Lamb," we read in one of the letters of Harriet Lady Granville, "have been engaged in a correspondence, the subject whether learning Greek purifies or inflames the passions." The right answer to the conundrum is, perhaps, that it depends upon the learner—or else that it depends upon the teacher. Lady Oxford's passions, at any rate, were, like Lady Caroline's, inflammable. She was forty—the romantic age in the view of the philosophers; and she was unhappily married. Byron spoke of her to Medwin as "sacrificed, almost before she was a woman, to one whose mind and body were equally contemptible." A less prejudiced witness, Uvedale Price, wrote to Rogers, at the time of her death: "There could not, in

all respects, be a more ill-matched pair than herself and Lord Oxford, or a stronger instance of the cruel sports of Venus or, rather, of Hymen."

Byron was in love with her, or thought so—he was not quite clear which when he poured his confidences on the subject into Medwin's ear. Lady Caroline's suspicions, to that extent, were justified. The "autumnal charms"—it is he who calls them so—fascinated him for about eight months. "The autumn of a beauty like hers," he said, "is preferable to the spring in others." He added that he "had great difficulty in breaking with her," and "once was on the point of going abroad with her, and narrowly escaped this folly." How he escaped it—or why he avoided it—he does not say; but perhaps we may find a reason.

Of his intentions, at any rate, there is no room for doubt. We have no need to depend on Medwin's evidence for the full proof is in Byron's own letters. It is mixed up with a good deal of extraneous matter, but it is there; and a series of very brief citations will present the romance, such as it was, in outline:

> To William Bankes on September 12, 1812: "The only persons I know are the Rawdons and Oxfords, with some later acquaintances of less brilliant descent. But I do not trouble them much."
>
> To Hanson on October 22, 1812: "I am going to Lord Oxford's, Eywood, Presteigne, Hereford."

Letters are dated from Presteigne on October 31, November 8, and November 16. A letter of November 22 begins, "On my return here

(Cheltenham) from Lord Oxford's." A January letter shows Byron once again at Lord Oxford's; and then the references to the contemplated foreign tour—letters of which there is no mistaking the significance—begin:

> To Hanson on February, 27, 1813: "It is my determination, on account of a malady to which I am subject, and for other weighty reasons, to go abroad again almost immediately. To this you will object; but, as my intention cannot be altered, I have only to request that you will assist me as far as in your power to make the necessary arrangements."
>
> To Hanson on March 1, 1813: "Your objections I anticipated and can only repeat that I cannot act otherwise; so pray hasten some arrangement—for with, or without, I must go."
>
> To Hanson on March 6, 1813: "I must be ready in April at whatever risk—at whatever loss."
>
> To Charles Hanson on March 24, 1813: "Pray tell your father to get the money on Rochdale, or I must sell it directly. I must be ready by the last week in *May*, and am consequently pressed for time. I go first to Cagliari in Sardinia, and then on to the Levant."
>
> To Mrs. Leigh on March 26, 1813: "I am going abroad again in June, but should wish to see you before my departure.... On Sunday, I set off for a fortnight for Eywood,

near Presteigne, in Herefordshire—with the *Oxfords*. I see you put on a *demure* look at the name, which is very becoming and matronly in you; but you won't be sorry to hear that I am quite out of a more serious scrape with another singular personage, which threatened me last year."

To Hanson on April 15, 1813: "I shall only be able to see you a few days in town, as I shall sail before the 20th of May."

To Hanson on April 17, 1813: "I wish, if possible, the arrangement with Hoare to be made immediately, as I must set off forthwith."

To John Murray on April 21, 1813: "Send in my account to Bennet Street, as I wish to settle it before sailing."

To Hanson on June 3, 1813; "I am as determined as I have been for the last six months.... Everything is ordered and ready now. Do not trifle with me, for I am in very solid serious earnest.... I have made my choice, and go I will."

To Hodgson on June 8, 1813: "I shall manage to see you somewhere before I sail, which will be next month."

To John Murray on June 12, 1813: "Recollect that my lacquey returns in the Evening, and that I set out for Portsmouth to-morrow."

To William Gifford on June 18, 1813: "As I do not sail quite so soon as Murray may have

> led you to expect (not till July), I trust I may have some chance of taking you by the hand before my departure."
>
> To Mrs. Leigh, in the same month: "If you knew *whom* I had put off besides my journey, you would think me grown strangely fraternal."
>
> To Moore on July 8, 1813: "The Oxfords have sailed almost a fortnight, and my sister is in town, which is a great comfort."

That is the skeleton of the romance. Such clothes as it is felt to need the imagination must provide. Byron's position seems to have been perilously near that of a "tame cat," though he might have preferred to call himself, then, as on a later occasion, a *cavaliere servente*. His excuse is that he was only twenty-five, and that a fascinating woman of forty can be very fascinating indeed, and very clever at getting her own way. Her attempt to annex Byron, though she was fifteen years his senior, may be viewed as her gambler's throw for happiness. She threw and lost—but she lost quietly. She resembled Lady Caroline in being romantic, but she differed from her in not being "obstreperous." There was no scandal for society to take note of, and the welkin never rang with her complaints, though she did walk about Rome displaying Byron's portrait at her girdle.

Nor did it ring with Byron's, who, indeed, had nothing to complain of. The few allusions to the affair which Hobhouse contributes throw very little light upon it. He notes, in one place, that Lady Oxford was "most uncommon in her talk and licentious." He adds, on another page, the memorandum: "Got a picture of Lady Oxford from

Mrs. Mee. Lord B.'s money for it." That is all; and there are no hints to be derived from "occasional" verses. However much Lady Oxford may have pleased Byron, she did not inspire him. The period of his intimacy with her was, from the literary point of view, a singularly barren period; and the allusions cited from the letters—they are all the allusions that can be cited—are chiefly instructive because of the difference between their tone and the tone of certain other letters written very soon afterwards.

There is no suggestion in them of deep sentiment. What they do suggest is—first, a young man desperately determined to go through with a desperate adventure, and very much afraid of being warned of the consequences of his folly—then a young man who, having a haunting doubt of his own sincerity, shouts to keep up his courage—finally a young man who is grateful to the circumstances, whatever they may have been, which have deflected him from a rash course, and saved him from himself. One turns a few pages, and finds Byron writing in a very different strain:

> "I have said nothing of the brilliant sex; but the fact is, I am at this moment in a far more serious, and entirely new, scrape, than any of the last twelve months, and that is saying a good deal. It is unlucky we can neither live with nor without these women."
>
> "I would incorporate with any woman of decent demeanour to-morrow—that is, I would a month ago, but at present...."
>
> "Some day or other, when we are *veterans*, I may tell you a tale of present and past times; and it is not from want of confidence that I

> do not tell you now.... All this would be very well if I had no heart; but, unluckily, I have found that there is such a thing still about me, though in no very good repair, and also that it has a habit of attaching itself to *one*, whether I will or no."

These passages are from letters to Moore. A few days before writing the last of them Byron had written to Miss Milbanke, whom he was shortly to marry:

> "I am at present a little feverish—I mean mentally—and, as usual, on the brink of something or other, which will probably crush me at last, and cut our correspondence short, with everything else."

No names are mentioned here; but certain inferences not only can, but inevitably must, be drawn. At some time towards the end of the summer of 1813, there was a crisis of Byron's life. It did not come to a head until after Lady Oxford's departure, and Lady Oxford had nothing whatever to do with it. The latter point not only follows from the sudden disappearance of Lady Oxford from Byron's sphere of interest, but is specifically made in a letter (dated November 8, 1813) from Byron to his sister:

> "MY DEAREST AUGUSTA,
>
> "I have only time to say that my long silence has been occasioned by a thousand things (with which *you* are not concerned). It is not Lady Caroline, nor Lady Oxford; *but perhaps you may guess*, and if you do, do not tell. You do not know what mischief your being with me might have prevented. You shall hear from me to-morrow: in the meantime don't

be alarmed. I am in *no immediate* peril."

Those are the most significant of the letters, though there are others. Even if they stood alone, one would feel sure that there was a story behind them; but they do not stand alone. We have the poems to set beside them, and we have also the journal which Byron kept from November 14, 1813 till April 19, 1814. Letters, poems, and journal, read in conjunction, furnish a clue which it is impossible to mistrust. The distinction of having first so read them with sufficient care to find the clue belongs to Mr. Richard Edgcumbe.

Possibly Mr. Edgcumbe has proved just a little too much—that question will have to be faced when we come to it; but our immediate task must be to track the story along the lines which he has indicated, and see how all the mysteries connected with Byron can be solved, and all the emotional inconsistencies of his life unified, by the recollection that, of all the many passions of his life, there was only one which really mattered to him.

Many women were welcome to love him if they liked —he was a man very ready to let himself be loved; but only one woman had the power to make him suffer—and that woman was Mary Chaworth. The motto "Cherchez la femme" may, in short, in his case, be particularised. Whenever his conduct and his utterances seem, on the face of it, inexplicable, we have to look for Mary Chaworth and see her re-asserting a power which has been allowed to lapse; and we will turn to look for her now.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EMOTIONAL CRISIS—THOUGHTS OF MARRIAGE, OF FOREIGN TRAVEL, AND OF MARY CHAWORTH

The poems written during the dark period of Byron's life which we have now to consider are "The Giaour," "The Bride of Abydos," "The Corsair," and "Lara." Mr. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, in his introduction to "The Bride of Abydos," attributed the gloom to the fact that Byron "had been staying at Aston Hall, Rotherham, with his friend James Wedderburn Webster, and had fallen in love with his friend's wife, Lady Frances." It will be time enough to treat that suggestion seriously when more evidence is offered in support of it. The one important reference to Lady Frances in the Letters certainly does not bear it out:

> "I stayed a week with the Websters, and behaved very well, though the lady of the house is young, religious, and pretty, and the master is my particular friend. I felt no wish for anything but a poodle dog, which they kindly gave me."

That is all; and it is not in tune with those allusions, veiled by asterisks, to a consuming and destroying passion, with which the Journal is thickly sprinkled. On the other hand the open references to Mary Chaworth scattered throughout Byron's autobiographical utterances are perfectly in tune with these enigmatical invocations of an Unknown Lady. Even if it could not be shown that she and Byron met during this period of mental anguish, we should still be tempted to conjecture that she and the Unknown Lady were one; and, as a matter of fact, we know that they did meet, and also know enough of the terms on which they met to be able to clear up the situation beyond much possibility of doubt. The key to it, indeed, is the letter written by Byron to Mary Chaworth five years after their final separation:

> "My own, we may have been very wrong, but I repent of nothing except that cursed marriage, and your refusing to continue to love me as you had loved me. I can neither forget nor *quite forgive* you for that precious piece of reformation. But I can never be other than I have been, and whenever I love anything, it is because it reminds me in some way or other of yourself."

That letter by itself proves practically the whole case. It does not matter whether it is his own marriage or Mary Chaworth's that Byron speaks of as "cursed"—

the epithet may well have seemed to him equally applicable to either union. The essential point is that Byron could not conceivably have written in this tone to Mary Chaworth in 1818 if he had had no relations, or only formal relations, with her since 1809. The mere fact—the only openly acknowledged fact—that she had jilted him when he was a schoolboy would certainly not have warranted him in reproaching her with "refusing to continue to love" at a date thirteen years subsequent to his rejection. The letter obviously, and undeniably, implies an intimacy of later date in which his passion was reciprocated.

Later acquaintance, indeed, apart from intimacy, can easily be demonstrated, in spite of the suppressions of the biographers. "I remember meeting her," Byron himself said to Medwin, "after my return from Greece"; and the statement is confirmed, as Medwin's statements generally need to be, from other sources. It appears from Byron's own letters that Mary Chaworth, or some member of her family, took charge of his robes after one of his attendances at the House of Lords; and a letter from Mary Chaworth to Byron, in the possession of Mr. Murray, is printed by Mr. Edgcumbe. It speaks of a seal which Byron was having made for her. The seal is still in existence, and is in the possession of the Musters family. The approximate date of its presentation is fixed by an entry in Byron's journal:

> "Mem. I must get a toy to-morrow for Eliza, and send the device for the seals of myself and ——."

Here, at any rate, we get one clear case in which the asterisks in the Journal not only appear to indicate

Mary Chaworth, but cannot possibly indicate anybody else. It does not follow, of course, that we are entitled to insert her name wherever we encounter asterisks—for Byron and his editors have, from time to time, had various reasons for thus concealing various names; but the cases in which the asterisks do refer to her are, when once this clue is provided, tolerably easy to distinguish. Furnished with the clue, we can at once unravel the skein of events and construct a consistent picture of these critical months in Byron's career; and we may begin with the picture which he drew of himself to Medwin:

> "I was at this time," he says, "a mere Bond Street lounger—a great man at lobbies, coffee and gambling houses: my afternoons were passed in visits, luncheons, lounging, and boxing—not to mention drinking."

This is true, and yet, at the same time, it is not true. The picture is, at once, confirmed by the Letters and the Journal and contradicted by them. It is a picture in which, so to say, all the lights are glaring, and all the shadows are left out. The truest thing in it is the after-thought, added a few sentences lower down; "Don't suppose, however, that I took any pleasure in all these excesses." In that moody claim we get, of course, the reflection, or recollection, of the Byronic pose; and at this period, if not at all periods, there was grim reality behind the pose, and Byron fully justifies the description of him as the most sincere man who ever struck an attitude.

It would be easy to depict him, whether from his letters or from contemporary memoirs, as the dissipated darling of society. The year 1813 was the

year in which he and Madame de Staël were the rival lions of the season, roaring against each other, not entirely without jealousy. The list of his social engagements, if one troubled to draw it out, would have a very formidable appearance. It would show him going everywhere, meeting everybody, doing everything. We should see him at the great houses, such as Lady Melbourne's, Lady Holland's, Lady Jersey's. We should discover him at the opera and the theatre, now in their boxes, now in his own, and at men's dinners, with Sheridan, and Rogers, "Conversation Sharp," and other brilliant talkers. We should also find him patronising "the fancy," and losing his money at hazard, and drinking several bottles of claret at a sitting—retiring to bed in a sublime state of exaltation, and rising from it with a shocking headache.

That, however, would only be one half the picture. Many contemporary observers remarked that Byron passed through the haunts of pleasure with a scowl, and that his face wore a frown whenever his features were in repose. One would infer from that, not that Byron, while really enjoying himself, posed, for the sake of effect, as a man who was secretly eating his heart out, but rather that some secret trouble was actually gnawing at his heart while he made the gestures of a man of pleasure; and the Letters and the Journal—more particularly the Journal—give us many glimpses at this darker side of his life. If he often accepted the invitations which continued to be showered on him, he also frequently declined them, locking himself up alone in his chambers to read, and write, and think things out—persuading himself, after some months had lapsed, that he had really been very little into society, and that it was a matter of indifference to him whether he went into it again

or not.

And this, it will be observed, is a new note which only begins to be sounded in his intimate writings towards the end of the summer of 1813, after he has allowed Lady Oxford to go abroad alone. There is nothing like it in the days of his dalliance with her. Still less is there anything like it in the writings of the days of his dalliance with Lady Caroline Lamb. Those episodes and adventures, it is quite clear, only touched the surface of his nature. He first pursued them, and then ceased to pursue them, with laughter on his lips, and self-satisfaction—one might even say jollity—in his heart. There was not even anything in them to cradle him into song. The interval between the "Thyrza" poems and the passionate allegorical tales of which "The Giaour" was the first—an interval of some eighteen months—was poetically uneventful. A period of feverish activity succeeded; and it coincided with a renewal of relations with Mary Chaworth.

Mary Chaworth had lived unhappily with the handsome squire whom she had, so naturally, preferred to the fat boy from Harrow. He had been, as these red-faced, full-blooded Philistines are so apt to be, at once jealous, unfaithful, and brutal, wanting to "have it both ways,"—to push rivals brusquely out of his path, and to pursue his own coarse pleasures where he chose. He had forbidden his wife to see Byron. He had insisted upon her absence from Annesley at the time of Byron's return from Greece; and he had found her, whether willingly or unwillingly, compliant. But he had also, by his own conduct, caused scandals which had set the tongues of the neighbours wagging; and, in doing that, he had presumed too far. There had been a separation

by mutual consent; and it was after the separation that the meeting with Byron took place.

There was little about him now to remind Mary of the fat boy whom she had laughed at. The Turkish baths, the Epsom salts, and the regimen of biscuits and soda-water had done their work. He came to her as a man of ethereal beauty, fascinating manners, and undisputed genius; and he left other women—women of higher rank, greater importance, and more widely acknowledged charm—in order to come to her. Nor did he come with the triumphant air of a man who was resolved to dazzle her in order to avenge a slight. He came, as it were, because he could not help himself—because he felt cords drawing him—because this was his destiny and he must fulfil it, though he forfeited the whole world in doing so.

Her case was hard. She was not one of the women who readily do desperate things in scorn of consequence. The traditions of her class, the claims of her family—the precepts, also, one imagines, of her religion—had too strong a hold on her for that. These very hesitations, no doubt,—so different from the "on coming" ways of Lady Caroline, and Lady Oxford's "terrible love," as Balzac phrases it, "of the woman of forty"—were a part of her charm for Byron. But she was very unhappy, and Byron was offering her a little happiness; and it was very, very difficult for her to refuse the gift. So the history of the matter seems, in a sentence or two, to have been this: that she was slow to yield, but yielded; that she had no sooner yielded than she repented; that her repentance left Byron a desperate, heart-broken man, profoundly cynical about women—so cynical about them that he could speak even of her, while he still

loved her, to Medwin, as “like the rest of her sex, far from angelic”—ready to marry out of pique, or from any other motive equally unworthy.

The details must remain obscure. They passed in the secret orchard; and Byron was not, like Victor Hugo, a man who treated his secret orchard as a park to be thrown open to excursionists. He knew that there was a time to keep silence as well as a time to speak; and though there were some episodes in his life of which he spoke too much, of this particular episode he only spoke to Moore and Mrs. Leigh, whom he could trust. Yet, given the clues, the story constructs itself; and we must either believe the story which arises out of those clues, or else believe that the most passionate poems which Byron ever wrote were the outcome of a spiritual crisis about nothing in particular. And that, of course, is absurd.

We find him, at the beginning of the crisis, pondering two escapes from it—the escape by way of marriage, and the escape by way of foreign travel. He talks, in the middle of July, of proposing to Lady Adelaide Forbes; he talks, at the end of August, of proposing to anyone who is likely to accept him; but in neither instance does he talk like a man who really means what he says. This is the July announcement:

> “My circumstances are mending, and were not my other prospects blackening, I would take a wife, and that should be the woman had I a chance.... The Staël last night said that I had no feeling, was totally *in*sensible to *la belle passion*, and *had* been all my life. I am very glad to hear it, but did not know it before.”

Then in August he writes:

> "After all, we must end in marriage; and I can conceive nothing more delightful than such a state in the country, reading the county newspaper, &c., and kissing one's wife's maid. Seriously, I would incorporate with any woman of decent demeanour to-morrow—that is, I would a month ago, but at present——."

The word "seriously" there is evidently a *façon de parler*. The writer's mood may be serious, but his intentions evidently are not. It may be doubted whether the thoughts of travel were any more serious, though they lasted longer. In letter after letter we find Byron making inquiries about a passage in a ship of war bound for the Levant. When such a passage is offered to him, however, he declines it on the ground that he is unable to obtain accommodation for as many servants as he desires to take with him; and that explanation inevitably strikes one as a pretext rather than a reason—the pretext of a man who, while he knows that it would be better to go, is looking for an excuse to stay.

Projects of travel with his sister and with various friends fell through at about the same time, for reasons which are nowhere stated, but can very easily be guessed. We cannot read the letters, dark though the allusions are, without being conscious of a thickening plot. It thickens very perceptibly when we discover Byron at Newstead at a time when Mary Chaworth, forsaken by her husband, is at Annesley. There is nearly a month's gap in the published letters at this point; but conjecture can easily fill the gap in the light of the letter from Byron to Mrs. Leigh,

already quoted, which is dated November 8:

> "It is not Lady Caroline nor Lady Oxford; but perhaps you may guess, and if you *do*, do not tell.
>
> "You do not know what mischief your being near me might have prevented. You shall hear from me to-morrow; in the meantime, don't be alarmed. I am in *no immediate* peril."

One is further helped to understand by a letter to Moore written, after a longer silence than usual, on November 30:

> "Since I last wrote to you, much has occurred, good, bad, and indifferent,—not to make me forget you, but to prevent me of reminding you of one who, nevertheless, has often thought of you....
>
> "Your French quotation was very confoundedly to the purpose,—though very *unexpectedly* pertinent, as you may imagine by what I *said* before, and my silence since. However, 'Richard's himself again,' and except all night, and some part of the morning, I don't think very much about the matter."

The French quotation referred to is Fontenelle's: "Si je recommençais ma carrière je ferais tout ce que j'ai fait." The inference from the allusion to it, and from the two letters given, is quite clear. Something has happened—at Newstead or in the neighbourhood, as the dates demonstrate—something which Byron cannot bring himself to regret, even though he feels that it is going to make trouble for him. Hints at the

possibility of a duel which follow in later letters make it not less clear that the trouble—or a part of it—may come from the indignation of an angry husband. "I shall not return his fire," Byron writes—an indication, we may take it, that a sense of guilt, and some remorse, is mingled with his passion.

That is what we gather, and cannot help gathering, from the letters, in spite of their vagueness and intentional obscurity. We will take up the thread of the story from them again in a moment. In the meanwhile we will turn to the Journal and see how Byron presents the story to himself.

CHAPTER XV

RENEWAL AND INTERRUPTION OF RELATIONS WITH MARY CHAWORTH

The Journal is only a fragment, kept only for five months. It is a record rather of emotions than of events—the chronicle of the emotions of a man who feels the need of talking to himself of matters of which he cannot easily talk to others, but who, even in speaking to himself, speaks in riddles. It begins soon after the "mischief" of which Augusta has been told has happened, and while he is entangled in the "scrape" mentioned to Moore. The talk on the first

page is of travel—"provided I neither marry myself, nor unmarry any one else in the interval"; and there immediately follows a reference to the writing of "The Bride of Abydos":

> "I believe the composition of it kept me alive —for it was written to drive my thoughts from the recollection of—
>
> > "*Dear sacred name, rest ever unreveal'd.*"
>
> "At least, even here, my hand would tremble to write it."

"The Bride," he insists, was written for himself, and not with any view to publication. "I am sure, had it not been for Murray, *that* would never have been published, though the circumstances which are the groundwork make it ... heigho!" "It was written," he adds, "in four days to distract my thoughts from * * *"; and then we perceive that he is in correspondence with the lady thus enigmatically designated. He is expecting a letter from her which does not arrive. What, he asks himself, is the meaning of that?

> "Not a word from * * * Have they set out from * * *? or has my last precious epistle fallen into the lion's jaws? If so—and this silence looks suspicious—I must clap on my 'musty morion' and 'hold out my iron.' I am out of practice—but I won't begin again at Manton's now. Besides, I would not return his shot. I was once a famous wafer-splitter; but then the bullies of society made it necessary. Ever since I began to feel that I had a bad cause to support, I have left off the

exercise."

The probability of a challenge from an injured husband is evidently contemplated here. No challenge came, the injured man remaining in ignorance of his injury; but peace of mind nevertheless remained unattainable. No connected narrative, indeed, can be pieced together. It is hardly ever possible to declare that such and such a thing happened on such and such a day. There is only the general impression that things are happening, and that, whether they happen or do not happen, a tragedy is always in progress. We come presently to a curiously significant note on the *raison d'être* of Byron's practice of fasting:

> "I should not so much mind a little accession of flesh—my bones can well bear it. But the worst is, the devil always came with it,—till I starved him out,—and I will *not* be the slave of *any* appetite. If I do err, it shall be my heart, at least, that heralds the way."

But a man does not write like that unless his heart has heralded the way, and he is following it. Byron's trouble was not that he had failed to follow the road which his heart pointed, but that he had followed it into an *impasse*. He had reached a point at which the only way out was the way on; but he could not follow it alone, and his companion would not follow it with him. She had gone a little way with him, and then taken fright at his and her own temerity.

It is a question whether we should pity her for her lack of courage or praise her for remembering her principles after she had yielded to temptation; but we should need more knowledge of the facts than we have in order to answer it with confidence.

Exceptional people may do exceptional things with impunity—it is sometimes for lack of the nerve to do them that they make shipwreck of their lives; but though Byron was an exceptional man, we have no proof that Mary Chaworth was an exceptional woman. She had neither the romantic audacity of George Sand, nor that audacity of the superior person which upheld George Eliot in her bold misappropriation of another woman's name. Probably, if she had had it, Byron would have classed her with the "blues," and either have tired of her at once or turned away from her very quickly. She had, no doubt, exceptional charm, but no exceptional strength of character. She was just a weak woman launched into a situation to which the old rules did not apply, but afraid to break them, ashamed of having broken them, obstinate in her refusal to go on breaking them.

Catastrophe, in those circumstances, was inevitable. The bold course might have led to it—for a weak woman, brought up in the fear of her neighbours, can only take a bold course at grave risks. The weak course—since the love of the heart and not merely the passion of the senses was at stake—was bound to lead to it, and did. The only question was whether the victims of the catastrophe would suffer in silence or would cry aloud; and the answer to that question, given the characters of the victims, could easily be predicted. Mary Chaworth would be silent, would make believe to the best of her ability, would wear a mask, and pose, and persuade the world that she was behaving naturally. Byron, disdaining to pretend, proclaiming the truth about his own heart even while respecting Mary's secret—proclaiming it quite naturally though rather noisily—would appear to the world to be posing.

He did so; but before we observe him doing so, we may turn back to the Journal, and study a few more of its enigmatic passages with the help of the clues at our disposal:

> "I awoke from a dream! well! and have not others dreamed? but she did not overtake me.... Ugh! how my blood chilled,—and I could not wake—and—heigho!... I do not like this dream,—I hate its 'foregone conclusions.'"

> "No letters to-day;—so much the better,—there are no answers. I must not dream again;—it spoils even reality. I will go out of doors and see what the fog will do for me."

> "Ward talks of going to Holland, and we have partly discussed an *ensemble* expedition.... And why not? —— is distant, and will be at ——, still more distant, till spring. No one else except Augusta cares for me; no ties—no trammels."

> "No dreams last night of the dead, nor the living; so—I am 'firm as the marble, founded on the rock,' till the next earthquake....

> "... I am tremendously in arrear with my letters—except to ——, and to her my thoughts overpower me;—my words never compass them."

> "I believe with Clym o' the Clow, or Robin Hood, 'By our Mary (dear name!) thou art both mother and May, I think it never was a man's lot to die before his day.'"



Mary Chaworth.

"—— has received the portrait safe; and, in answer the only remark she makes upon it is, 'indeed it is like'—and again 'indeed it is like.' With her the likeness 'covered a multitude of sins,' for I happen to know this portrait was not a flatterer, but dark and stern,—even black as the mood in which my mind was scorching last July when I sat for it."

"I am *ennuyé* beyond my usual tense of that yawning verb, which I am always

> conjugating; and I don't find that society much mends the matter. I am too lazy to shoot myself—and it would annoy Augusta, and perhaps ——."
>
> "Much done, but nothing to record. It is quite enough to set down my thoughts,—my actions will rarely bear retrospection."
>
> "The more I see of men the less I like them. If I could say so of women too, all would be well. Why can't I? I am now six-and-twenty; my passions have had enough to cool them; my affections more than enough to wither them,—and yet, and yet, always *yet* and *but*."
>
> "I must set about some employment soon; my heart begins to eat *itself* 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 even 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-down library.
>
> "I will keep no further journal of that same hesternal torch-light; and to prevent me from returning, like a dog, to the vomit of memory, I tear out the remaining leaves of this volume. To be sure, I have long despised myself and man, but I never spat in the face of my species before, 'O fool! I shall go mad!'"

These entries, as everyone who has read them through will have remarked, are all variations on a

single theme; and there are many more entries in the same key, which have been left unquoted. They succeed each other, week after week, and almost day after day, for a period of about five months. The story of the events to which they relate has been told, and need not be repeated. One may think of them as the cries attendant on the birth pangs of those aspects of Byron's character and personality which the world knows specifically as Byronism. Other tragedies, indeed, were to come to pass—and were to be necessary—before the angry heart could dash itself with its full force against the desolations of the world; but the train was being laid for those tragedies too; and by the time Byron flung his unfinished Diary down, the thing called Byronism was born.

Curiously enough, indeed, even the political Byronism can be seen coming to birth at the time of the writing of the Journal. The Byron who was presently, while in exile, to harbour revolutionists, and make his house their arsenal, deride the Tsar of All the Russias as a "Billy bald-coot," and shake his fist in the faces of the "holy three," already begins to reveal himself in its pages with scoffing remarks about legitimate kings and the hereditary principle. Perhaps it is only a case of instinct asserting itself and the imperious need to find something to scoff at following the line of least resistance; but that does not matter. What does matter is that here was a crisis and a turning point in Byron's development, brought about because Mary Chaworth had come back into his life, had passed through it, and had passed out of it again.

Mr. Richard Edgcumbe reads, and has written, still more details into the story, startling students of

Byron's biography with the suggestion that a child was born as the result of the intimacy—that Mrs. Leigh adopted the child and pretended that it was her own—that the child thus secretly born and falsely acknowledged was no other than Medora Leigh, who turned out so badly, and whose alleged autobiography was published by Charles Mackay. Passages can be quoted from the poems—and perhaps also from the letters—which might conceivably contain veiled allusions to such a transaction. None, however, can be quoted which require that explanation as an alternative to remaining unintelligible; and, in the absence of positive evidence, all the probabilities are against Mr. Edgcumbe's theory.

Such a secret as he hints at—and indeed almost affirms—would have been very difficult to keep; and it is hard to believe that Mrs. Leigh's sense of duty to her husband, with whom she was on the best of terms, would have allowed her to be a party to the alleged conspiracy. Those are a few of the most obvious objections; and they must be given the greater weight because Byron's bitter cries and altered attitude towards life are more easily explicable without Mr. Edgcumbe's hypothesis than with it. Loving the real mother so passionately, and having such a faithful friend in the supposed mother, he would assuredly not have been content to live out his life in exile without ever making an attempt to see his daughter, and without constant and particular inquiries after her. So why strain credulity so far when, without straining it, everything can be made plain and clear?

There was a renewal of intimacy, and then a suspension of intimacy; a fear of a public scandal

which proved to be groundless; a risk of a duel which was, after all, avoided. That is all that is certain; but that suffices to explain the references to "scrapes" and "mischief" and the rest of it; and that also, on the assumption that Byron was passionately sincere, explains the depth and disgusted vehemence of his emotions. He had dreamed of Mary Chaworth before as the one woman in the world with whom he could live out the whole of his life in a continuous ecstasy of intense emotion; but he had from time to time awakened from his dream. Now the dream had become a reality—and the reality had not lasted. She had been too high principled—or too much afraid. He had not been strong enough to give her courage —or to shake her principles. And therefore....

Therefore he wrote poem after poem, all on the same theme, all in the same key—poems of farewell, of everlasting sorrow and despair, and of that sense of guilt, not defiant as yet, of which Mr. Edgcumbe makes so much, but which are perhaps best read as the reflection of Mary Chaworth's own horror—the horror of a mind perilously near insanity—at the thing which she had done, but was resolved to do no more. He wrote this, for instance:

> "*There is no more for me to hope,*
> *There is no more for thee to fear;*
> *And, if I give my sorrow scope,*
> *That sorrow thou shalt never hear.*
> *Why did I hold thy love so dear?*
> *Why shed for such a heart one tear?*
> *Let deep and dreary silence be*
> *My only memory of thee!*"

He wrote the well-known lines, beginning:

> "*I speak not—I trace not—I breathe not thy*

name—
There is love in the sound—there is Guilt in the fame—
But the tear which now burns on my cheek may impart
The deep thoughts that dwell in that silence of heart."

He wrote, again, these lines, which are taken from "Lara":

"*The tempest of his heart in scorn had gazed*
On that the feebler Elements had raised.
The Rapture of his Heart had looked on high,
And asked if greater dwell beyond the sky:
Chained to excess, the slave of each extreme,
How woke he from the wildness of that dream!
Alas! he told not—but he did awake
To curse the withered heart that would not break."

And then, once more:

"*These lips are mute, these eyes are dry;*
But in my breast and in my brain,
Awake the pangs that pass not by,
The thought that ne'er shall sleep again.
My soul nor deigns nor dares complain,
Though Grief and Passion there rebel:
I only know we loved in vain—
I only feel—Farewell! Farewell!"

There is no need to quote more. Enough has been given to show how the passionate heart found passionate utterance, and what a wound the wrench had left. Afterwards, of course, when it was all over —or as much over as it ever would be—Byron realised that a man of twenty-six could not well

consecrate all the rest of his years to lamentation. He had to live out his life somehow, with the help of incident of some sort; and incident in such a case must mean either a fresh love affair or marriage.

In Byron's case it meant marriage—the very marriage which Lady Melbourne had designed as a distraction for him from the too-pointed attentions of Lady Caroline Lamb.

CHAPTER XVI

MARRIAGE

Whatever doubts and mysteries environ the circumstances of Byron's separation from his wife, there is, at any rate, nothing to perplex us in the train of events which brought about his marriage, though the two common and conflicting theories have to be set aside. He did not marry Miss Milbanke for money; he did not marry her for love; he married her, partly because he had persuaded himself that he wanted a wife, and partly because she had made up her mind that he should do so.

He cannot have married her for money because, at that date, her fortune was inconsiderable and her expectations were vague. She had only £10,000; and

"good lives" stood between her and the prospect of any substantial inheritance. Seeing that Newstead, when put up to auction, was bought in for £90,000, a dowry of £10,000 was of no particular consequence to Byron, and if he had been fortune-hunting, he would have hunted bigger game. The fortune which he did capture was not enough to save him from almost instant financial embarrassments; and he faced that prospect as one who viewed it with indifference. "She is said," he wrote to Moore, "to be an heiress, but of that I really know nothing certainly, and shall not inquire. But I do know that she has talents and excellent qualities."

But if it is clear that Byron was not an interested, it is equally clear that he was not a passionate, suitor. He hardly could be so soon after the emotional stress through which we have seen him passing; and the proofs that he was not are conclusive. The most conclusive proof of all is that at the time when he proposed, by letter, to Miss Milbanke, he had not seen her, or made any attempt to see her, for ten months, and that, though he had, during those ten months, been corresponding with her, he had also, during those ten months, been pursuing sentimental adventures with which she had nothing to do. It was, as we have already seen, during those ten months that the renewed relations with Mary Chaworth were broken off; and when, after the close of those renewed relations, Byron's thoughts turned to marriage, it was not Miss Milbanke whom he first thought of marrying.

The desire to marry, in short, had only been a particular emotion with Byron when there was a possibility of marrying Mary Chaworth. Thereafter it was only a general emotion—a desire for an "escape

from life," and a domestic refuge from the storms which threatened shipwreck. He was tired of the struggle, and here was a prospect of rest. A little more than three months before his proposal to Miss Milbanke he was thinking of proposing to Lady Adelaide Forbes—ready to marry her, as he wrote to Moore, "with the same indifference which has frozen over the 'Black Sea' of all my passions." A fortnight later—almost to a day three months before the proposal—he writes again to Moore:

> "I *could* be very sentimental now, but I won't. The truth is, that I have been all my life trying to harden my heart, and have not yet quite succeeded—though there are great hopes—and you do not know how it has sunk with your departure."

Byron assuredly was not in love with Miss Milbanke when he wrote that; and he had no opportunity of falling in love with her in the course of the next three months, for he did not even see her. None the less he made up his mind to ask her to marry him—as an alternative to departing on a long foreign tour; and it is from Hobhouse's lately published narrative that we can best see how he was led, or lured, to that decision.

Byron had first met Miss Milbanke at the time when Lady Caroline Lamb was throwing herself at his head. Lady Caroline had shown him some verses which Miss Milbanke had written, and he had said that he considered them rather good—possibly because he thought so, but more probably because he wished to be polite. Soon afterwards, he had been presented to her, and had made her a first proposal of marriage, which she had declined.

The reasons alike for his offer and for her refusal of it remain obscure. He must, at any rate, have liked her; he was almost certainly getting tired of Lady Caroline's determination to monopolise and exploit him; perhaps he was also anxious to do anything in reason to oblige Lady Melbourne, who had the motives which we know of for desiring to bring about the match. Whether Miss Milbanke, on her part, preferred some other admirer or resented Lady Melbourne's attempt to make a convenience of her is doubtful. Both motives may have operated simultaneously; and Byron, at any rate, accepted his refusal in a philosophic spirit. It had not, Hobhouse says, "sunk very deep into his heart or preyed upon his spirits." He "did not pretend to regret Miss Milbanke's refusal deeply." Indeed "it might be said that he did not pretend to regret it at all." And Hobhouse describes a "ludicrous scene" when some common friend related that he had been rejected by Miss Milbanke, and burst into tears over the catastrophe.

> "Is that all?" said Lord Byron. "Perhaps then it will be some consolation for you to know that I also have been refused by Miss Milbanke."

Perhaps it was—some unsuccessful suitors are quite capable of taking comfort from such reflections; but that need not concern us. What we have to note is that Byron's rejection by Miss Milbanke resulted in his engaging in a long correspondence with her; and that the commencement of that correspondence was negotiated by Lady Melbourne. One infers that Lady Melbourne was a very clever woman, by no means innocent of "ulterior motives," far less ready than Byron to take "no" for an answer from Miss

Milbanke, and intuitively conscious that correspondences of this character are apt to weave entanglements for those who engage in them.

Some extracts from the correspondence are printed in Mr. Murray's Collected Edition of Byron's Works. There are references to it both in Byron's Journal and in Hobhouse's Account of the Separation. There is nothing in the text which it seems imperative to quote—nothing, that is to say, which perceptibly helps the story along. Byron's own letters are rather high-flown and artificial. The impression which one gathers from them is that of a man elaborately keeping alive the double pretence that he is unworthy and that he is disappointed—but only keeping it alive out of politeness. The nature of Miss Milbanke's letters can only be inferred from the one or two allusions which we find to them.

> "Yesterday, a very pretty letter from Annabella, which I answered. What an odd situation and friendship is ours!—without one spark of love on either side, and produced by circumstances which in general lead to coldness on one side and aversion on the other. She is a very superior woman, and very little spoiled.... She is a poetess—a mathematician—a metaphysician, and yet withal, very kind, generous, and gentle, with very little pretension. Any other head would be turned with half her acquisitions, and a tenth of her advantages."

That is what Byron says; but Hobhouse adds a little more. He says that Byron at first "believed that a certain eccentricity of education had produced this communication from a young woman otherwise

notorious for the strictest propriety of conduct and demeanour." He also says that the tone of the communications grew in warmth as the correspondence proceeded, and that Byron did not make up his mind to propose marriage a second time until "after certain expressions had been dropped by Miss Milbanke in her letters which might easily have encouraged a bolder man than his lordship." He says finally, and this he says, in italics, that when Byron did propose for the second time, Miss Milbanke *accepted him by return of post*. To which piece of information Moore adds the statement that in order to make assurance doubly sure, she sent her acceptance in duplicate to his town and his country addresses.

It reached him at Hastings; and Miss Milbanke proceeded to impart her news to her friends. A passage from one of the letters—that to Miss Milner—shows not only that she was very happy in the prospect of her marriage, but also that she had woefully deceived herself as to the circumstances which had preceded and led up to the proposal:

> "You only know me truly in thinking that without the highest moral esteem I could never have yielded to, if I had been weak enough to form, an attachment. It is not in the great world that Lord Byron's true character must be sought; but ask of those nearest to him—of the unhappy whom he has consoled, of the poor whom he has blessed, of the dependants to whom he is the best of masters. For his despondency I fear I am but too answerable for the last two years."

"The last two years" included, as we have seen, the period during which Byron was bombarding Hanson with perpetual and imperious demands for the ready money without which he could not go abroad with Lady Oxford—the period at which he told Moore that he was ready to "incorporate with any decent woman"—and the period at which he wrote "The Bride of Abydos" in order to "distract my thoughts from * * *" Miss Milbanke, that is to say, exaggerated both her importance to Byron and her influence over him, flattering herself that there would have been no "Byronism" but for her coldness, and that the warmth of her affection, so long withheld, was the one thing wanting to make glorious summer of the winter of Byron's discontent.

It was not an unnatural hallucination. Young women of romantic disposition are easily flattered into such beliefs, especially if the gates are thronged with suitors. Having read of such situations in many novels, and dreamed of them in many dreams, they live in expectation of the day when life will be true to fiction and their dreams will be fulfilled. And sometimes, of course, the dreams are fulfilled—sometimes, but not very often, and hardly ever in the case of heroines who are, as Miss Milbanke was, commonplace in spite of their intelligence, cold, obstinate, unyielding, critical, vain, and inexperienced, quick to perceive slights, and slow to forgive them.

At all events they were not, in her case, destined to be fulfilled; and the initial improbability of their fulfilment may be inferred from a confession which Hobhouse reports.

"Lord Byron," Hobhouse writes, "frankly

> confessed to his companion that he was not in love with his intended bride; but at the same time he said that he felt for her that regard which he believed was the surest guarantee of matrimonial felicity."

No more than that. Byron was only marrying, Hobhouse assures us, from "a love of change, and curiosity and a feeling of a sort of necessity of doing such a thing once." So that the engagement may be said to have been entered upon with a clash of conflicting expectations; and though tact might have saved the adventurers from shipwreck, tact was precisely the quality in which they were both most conspicuously deficient.

It was on the last day of September, 1814, that Hobhouse heard of the engagement. On the first day of October he wrote his congratulations, and on October 19, he was invited to act as groomsman. Some time in the same month Byron paid his first visit to the Milbankes at Seaham. Thence he went to Cambridge to vote in favour of the candidature of his friend Dr. Clarke's candidature for the Professorship of Anatomy, and was applauded by the undergraduates in the Senate House. "This distinction," Hobhouse says, "to a literary character had never before been paid except in the instance of Archdeacon Paley"—a curious partner in the poet's glory. A month later Byron and Hobhouse set out together again for Seaham on what Hobhouse calls "his matrimonial scheme."

This was the occasion on which Byron confided to Hobhouse that he was not in love. A note in Hobhouse's Diary to the effect that "never was lover in less haste" affords contemporary corroboration of

the fact; and the Diary continues to be picturesque, giving us Hobhouse's critical, but not altogether unfavourable, impression of Miss Milbanke and her family:

> "Miss Milbanke is rather dowdy-looking, and wears a long and high dress, though she has excellent feet and ankles.... The lower part of her face is bad, the upper, expressive but not handsome, yet she gains by inspection.
>
> "She heard Byron coming out of his room, ran to meet him, threw her arms round his neck, and burst into tears. She did this *not before us*.... Lady Milbanke was so much agitated that she had gone to her room ... our delay the cause.... Indeed I looked foolish in finding out an excuse for our want of expedition....
>
> "Miss Milbanke, before us, was silent and modest, but very sensible and quiet, and inspiring an interest which it is easy to mistake for love. With me she was frank and open, without little airs and affectations....
>
> "Of my friend she seemed dotingly fond, gazing with delight on his bold and animated face ... this regulated, however, by the most entire decorum.
>
> "Old Sir Ralph Milbanke is an honest, red-faced spirit, a little prosy, but by no means devoid of humour.... My lady, who has been a dasher in her day, and has ridden the grey mare, is pettish and tiresome, but clever."

There is more; but that is the essence. The

impression which disengages itself is one of a well-bred but rather narrow provincialism. The Milbankes are not exactly great people, but the country cousins of great people—very decidedly their country cousins. The men are not quite men of the world; the women are very far from being women of the world—which is pretty much what one would expect in an age in which the country was so much more remote from the town than it is at present. Miss Milbanke, in particular, seems to strike the exact note of provincial correctitude alike in her display of the emotion proper to the occasion and in her concealment of it. Her correctitude was, no doubt, made still more correct by an unemotional disposition.

During the ceremony, which took place in her mother's drawing-room, she was very self-possessed—"firm as a rock," is Hobhouse's description of her demeanour. Things were happening as she had meant them to happen—one may almost say as she had contrived that they should happen. "I felt," says Hobhouse, "as if I had buried a friend"; but he nevertheless paid the compliments which were due, and Miss Milbanke, now Lady Byron, said just the right thing in reply to them:

> "At a little before twelve," Hobhouse notes, "I handed Lady Byron downstairs and into her carriage. When I wished her many years of happiness, she said, 'If I am not happy it will be my own fault.'"

Nothing could have been more proper than that; for that is just how things happen when the dreams come true. Such a saying sometimes is, and always should be, the prelude to "they lived happily

together ever afterwards"; and one can picture Lady Byron telling herself that things were happening, and would continue to happen, just as in a story-book.

Only there are two kinds of story-books. There are the story-books which are written for girls—and the others. This story was to be one of the others. The husband's past and the wife's illusions were almost bound to make it so—the more certainly because both husband and wife suffered from the defects of their qualities; and the defects of Lady Byron's qualities in particular were such as not only to make her helpless in the *rôle* which developments were to assign to her, but also to compel her to comport herself with something worse than a lack of dignity.

CHAPTER XVII

INCOMPATIBILITY OF TEMPER

A thick accretion of legend has gathered round Byron's life alike as an engaged and as a married man. Every biographer, whether friendly or hostile, has added fresh anecdotes to the heap. Almost all the stories are coloured by prejudice. Even when they seem to be derived from the same source, they are often mutually contradictory; so that it is, as a rule, a hopeless task to try to distinguish between fact and

fiction, or do more than disengage a general impression of discordant temperaments progressing from incompatibility to open war.

Even the period of the engagement is reported not to have been of unclouded happiness. A son of Sir Ralph Milbanke's Steward at Seaham has furnished recollections to that effect. "While Byron was at Seaham," says this witness, "he spent most of his time pistol-shooting in the plantation"—a strangely moody occupation for an affianced man; and he adds that, on the wedding morning, when all was prepared for the ceremony, "Byron had to be sought for in the grounds where he was walking in his usual surly mood." Mrs. Beecher Stowe tells us that Miss Milbanke, observing that her lover did not rejoice sufficiently in his good fortune, offered to release him from his promise—whereupon he "fainted entirely away," and so convinced her, for the moment, of the sincerity of his affection.

Similar stories, equally well attested and equally unconvincing, cluster round the departure of the married couple for Halnaby where they spent their honeymoon. Lady Byron told Lady Anne Barnard that the carriage had no sooner driven away from the door of the mansion than her husband turned upon her with "a malignant sneer" and derided her for cherishing the "wild hope" of "reforming him," saying: "Many are the tears you will have to shed ere that plan is accomplished. It is enough for me that you are my wife for me to hate you." The Steward's son, giving an alternative version of the story, declares that "insulting words" were spoken before leaving the park—"after which he appeared to sit in moody silence, reading a book for the rest of the journey." Byron's own account of the incident, as

given to Medwin, was as follows:

> "I was surprised at the arrangements for the journey, and somewhat out of humour to find a lady's maid stuck between me and my bride. It was rather too early to assume the husband; so I was forced to submit, but it was not with a very good grace. Put yourself in a similar situation, and tell me if I had not some reason to be in the sulks."

These three stories, it is clear, cannot all be true; and none of them can either be proved or disproved, though the last was contradicted by Hobhouse who said that he had inspected the carriage and found no maid in it. Similarly with the stories which follow. According to the Steward's son, Sir Ralph Milbanke's tenants assembled to cheer Byron on his arrival at Halnaby—but "of these he took not the slightest notice, but jumped out of the carriage and walked away, leaving his bride to alight by herself." There is also a story told by another authority, who cannot, however, have been an eye-witness, to the effect that Byron, awaking from his slumbers on his nuptial night, exclaimed, in his surprise at his strange surroundings, that he supposed he was in Hell.

All these stories, of course, are exceedingly shocking, if true; but there are no means of ascertaining whether they are true. Nothing can be positively affirmed except that the beginnings were inauspicious, and must have seemed the more inauspicious to Lady Byron because of that fond belief of hers, that her rejection of Byron in 1812 had caused him two years' mental agony, now at last to be happily removed by her condescending tenderness. A vast amount of tact—a vast amount of

give-and-take—would have been needed to make a success of a marriage concluded under that misapprehension; and Lord and Lady Byron were both of an age at which tact is, as a rule, a virtue only known by name.

Of Byron's tact we have an example in the famous dialogue: "Do I interrupt you, Byron?"... "Damnably." Of Lady Byron's tact we shall discover an instance at the crisis of her married life. In the meantime we must note that they made up their first quarrel—which may very well have been less serious at the time than it appeared to be in retrospect—and, at any rate, kept up appearances sufficiently well to deceive their closest friends. From Halnaby they returned to Seaham, where nothing happened except that Byron discovered his father-in-law to be a bore, addicted to dreary political monologuising over wine and walnuts. They next visited Mrs. Leigh at Six Mile Bottom, and then they proceeded to 13 Piccadilly Terrace—that unluckily numbered house, hired from the Duchess of Devonshire, in which many catastrophes were to occur, and a distress was presently to be levied for non-payment of the rent.

Mrs. Leigh, it will be observed, was pleasantly surprised to observe that the marriage seemed to be turning out well. She had the more reason to be surprised because she shared none of Lady Byron's illusions as to the part which she had played, for the past two years, in Byron's emotional and imaginative life. She was in her brother's confidence, and knew all about Lady Caroline Lamb, all about Lady Oxford, and—more particularly—all about Mary Chaworth. Consequently she had had her apprehensions, which she confided to Byron's friend Hodgson. A few extracts from her letters to Hodgson will bring this

point out, and show us how the marriage looked from her point of view. On February 15, 1815, she wrote:

> "It appears to me that Lady Byron *sets about* making him happy in quite the right way. It is true I judge at a distance, and we generally *hope* as we *wish*; but I assure you I don't conclude hastily on this subject, and will own to you, what I would not scarcely to any other person, that I had *many fears* and much anxiety *founded upon many causes and circumstances* of which I cannot *write*. Thank God! that they do not appear likely to be realised."

> On March 18, 1815: "Byron is looking remarkably well, and of Lady B. I hardly know how to write, for I have a sad trick of being struck dumb when I am most happy and pleased. The expectations I had formed could not be *exceeded*, but at least they are fully answered.

> "I think I never saw or heard of a more perfect being in mortal mould than she appears to be, and scarcely dared flatter myself such a one would fall to the lot of my dear B. He seems quite sensible of her value."

> On March 31, 1815: "Byron and Lady B. left me on Tuesday for London.... The more I see of her the more I love and esteem her, and feel how grateful I am, and ought to be, for the blessing of such a wife for my dear, darling Byron."

> On September 4, 1815: "My brother has just left me, having been here since last Wednesday, when he arrived very unexpectedly. I never saw him *so* well, and he is in the best spirits."

This is evidence not extorted by questions but spontaneously volunteered. If it proves nothing else, at least it proves that appearances were kept up, and that Augusta was deceived. But appearances, none the less, gave a false impression; and there were other friends, more keen sighted than Augusta, who saw through them. Hobhouse, in particular, did so. He too had had his anxieties, and had been watching; and the notes in his Diary—some of them contemporaneous with, but others subsequent to, Augusta's letters—are not unlike the rumblings of a coming thunderstorm.

> On March 25, 1815: "I went to bed out of spirits from indeterminate but chiefly low apprehensions about Byron."
>
> On April 1, 1815: "He advises me 'not to marry,' though he has the best of wives."
>
> On April 2, 1815: "Lady Oxford walks about Naples with Byron's picture on her girdle in front."
>
> On July 31, 1815: "Byron is not more happy than before marriage. D. Kinnaird is also melancholy. This is the state of man."
>
> On August 4, 1815: "Lord Byron tells me he and she have begun a little snubbing on money matters. 'Marry not,' says he."
>
> On August 8, 1815: "Dined with Byron, &c.

> All grumbled at life."
>
> On November 25, 1815: "Called on Byron. In that quarter things do not go well. Strong advice against marriage. Talking of going abroad."

There is nothing specific there; and when we set out to look for something specific, we only run up against gossip of doubtful authenticity. "Do I interrupt you?"... "Damnably," may be assumed to be authentic since Byron himself has admitted the repartee. It was rude and reprehensible, though it was probably provoked. The charges which young Harness, now in Holy Orders, heard preferred by some of Lady Byron's friends are rightly described by him as "nonsensical"; but we may as well have them before us in order to judge of the propriety of the epithet:

> "The poor lady had never had a comfortable meal since their marriage. Her husband had no fixed hour for breakfast, and was always too late for dinner.
>
> "At his express desire she had invited two elderly ladies to meet them in her opera-box. Nothing could be more courteous than his manner to them while they remained; but no sooner had they gone than he began to annoy his wife by venting his ill-humour, in a strain of bitterest satire, against the dress and manners of her friends."
>
> "Poor Lady Byron was afraid of her life. Her husband slept with loaded pistols by his bed-side, and a dagger under his pillow."

"Nonsensical" is decidedly the word for these allegations. The incidents, even if true, could only be symptoms, not causes, of the disagreement. Harness, perceiving that, seeks the true explanation of the estrangement in the disposition of Lady Byron, whom he had known as a girl. She "gave one the idea of being self-willed and self-opinionated." She "carried no cheerfulness along with her." The majority of her acquaintances "looked upon her as a reserved and frigid sort of being whom one would rather cross the room to avoid than be brought into conversation with unnecessarily." A common acquaintance remarked to Harness: "If Lady Byron has a heart, it is deeper seated and harder to get at than anybody else's heart whom I have ever known."

Et cetera. So far as we can judge Lady Byron by the letters in which she subsequently announced, without formulating, her grievances, the verdict seems a just one. She might be pictured, in the words of the author of "Ionica" as one who

> "*Smiles at all that's coarse and rash,*
> *Yet wins the trophies of the fight,*
> *Unscathed in honour's wreck and crash,*
> *Heartless, yet always in the right.*"

Or rather one begins so to picture her—and is even justified in so picturing her at the beginning—though presently, when one sees how unfairly she fought in the great fight which ensued, one changes one's mind about her, withdraws such sympathy as one has allowed to go out to her, and thinks of her husband when one comes to the final couplet of the poem:

> "*And I, dear passionate Teucer, dare*
> *Go through the homeless world with you.*"

Yet Lady Byron had her grievances, and though they were quite different from those which Harness has reported, they were not light ones. Two grievances in particular must have been very trying to the temper of a young bride who had been an only and spoiled child. In the first place, and almost at once, there was trouble about money. In the second place, and very soon, there was trouble about "the women of the theatre."

Byron, at the time of his marriage, was heavily in debt. His one idea of economy had always been to obtain credit instead of paying cash; and such cash as he had the handling of quickly slipped through his fingers. He never denied himself a luxury, and seldom refused a request for a loan. He had helped Augusta; he had helped Hodgson; he had helped Coleridge. Now he found his expenses increased out of all proportion to the increase of his income; while his creditors, assuming that his wife had a fortune, proceeded to press for the settlement of their accounts. Hence that "snubbing on money matters" to which we have seen Hobhouse referring; and the word "snubbing" may well have been a euphemism for more severe remonstrance when executions began to be levied. There were no fewer than ten executions in the house in the course of a few months; and one can understand that the experience was unfavourable to the temper of a young wife coming from a well-ordered home in which precise middle-class notions on such subjects had prevailed.

The simultaneous trouble about women, of course, made matters worse. Whether there was trouble about Mary Chaworth or not is uncertain; but, at any rate, Lady Byron met her and appears to have felt the pangs of jealousy. "Such a wicked looking cat I never

saw. Somebody else looked quite virtuous by the side of her," was her commentary to Augusta; and, if she spoke of Mary Chaworth as a cat, we need not suppose her to have been any more complimentary in her references to those actresses whose acquaintance she knew her husband to be making.

He had become, at this time, together with Lord Essex, George Lamb, Douglas Kinnaird, and Peter Moore, a member of the Sub-Committee of Management of Drury Lane Theatre. It does not appear that the Sub-Committee did a great deal except waste the time of the actual managers; but it is not to be supposed that they were altogether neglectful of the amenities of their position. They had "influence"; and upon the men who have "influence" actresses never fail to smile. Some actresses smiled upon Byron for that reason, and others smiled upon him for his own sake. Some of them, it may be, drew the line at smiling; but others, as certainly, did more than smile. Miss Jane Clairmont, in particular—but we shall come to Miss Jane Clairmont presently.

How much Lady Byron knew, at the time, about these matters is doubtful. She must have known a good deal, for actresses sometimes called at the house; and any defects in her knowledge may be presumed to have been eked out by conjecture. Knowledge, conjecture, and gossip, operating in concert, cannot have failed to make her feel uncomfortable. In this respect, as in others, things were not falling out as she had expected. The fondly cherished belief that her love was the one thing needful to Byron's happiness, and that he had moped for two years because she had withheld it from him, was receiving every day a ruder shock.

The shocks were the more violent because Byron, in the midst of his pecuniary embarrassments and theatrical philanderings, was attacked by a disorder of the liver. No man is at his best when his liver is sluggish; and Byron probably was at his worst—gloomy, contentious, and prone to uncontrollable outbursts of passion. So there were scenes—the sort of scenes that one would expect: Lady Byron, on the one hand, coldly and reasonably reproachful—"always in the right," and most careful not to lose her temper; Byron, on the other hand, talking to provoke her, boasting of abandoned wickedness, falling into fits of rage, much as his own mother had been wont to do when she rattled the fire-irons—throwing his watch on the ground and smashing it to pieces with the poker.

Very likely he was angry with Lady Byron because he did not love her—irritated beyond measure at every fresh revelation that she could never be to him what Mary Chaworth might have been. The beginning of unhappiness in marriage must often come like that. It is not unnatural, though it is unreasonable, and not to be combated by reason. Lady Byron, unhappily, had no other weapon than reason with which to combat it; and it is quite likely that her very reasonableness made the trouble worse. It did, at any rate, pass from bad to worse—and then from worse to worst—during the critical days of her confinement, at the end of 1815.

Those were the circumstances which paved the way for open war and the demand for judicial separation. Or, at all events, those were some of the circumstances; for the story is long, and intricate, and involved, and darkened with the clouds of controversy. Byron's version of it, it is needless to

say, is quite different from Lady Byron's. According to him the causes of the separation were "too simple to be easily found out." According to her, they included an enormity of which he dared not speak; and the clash of these conflicting allegations constitutes what has been called "the Byron mystery."

Perhaps it is not possible to solve the whole of that mystery even now. New evidence, however, has lately been adduced, on the one hand in Hobhouse's Diary and Narrative, and on the other hand from Lady Byron's correspondence, printed by the late Earl of Lovelace in "Astarte." By sifting it, we may at least contrive to come nearer to the truth—to put, as it were, a ring fence round the mystery—to distinguish the assertions which have been proved from the assertions which have been disproved, and to reduce within narrow limits the fragment of the mystery which, until more conclusive documents are produced, must still remain mysterious.

The late Earl of Lovelace, as is well-known, attempted to acquit his grandmother of a charge of evil-speaking by convicting his grandfather of a charge of unnatural vice. It will be necessary to consider whether he has succeeded or failed in the attempt. The latter charge, but for his revival of it, might have been waived aside as equally calumnious and incredible. As it is, a biographer cannot discharge his task without taking up the challenge. It shall be taken up with every possible avoidance of unpleasant detail, but taken up it must be; and the most convenient way to approach the subject will be first to tell the story as it is presented by Hobhouse who represented Byron throughout the negotiations.

CHAPTER XVIII

LADY BYRON'S DEMAND FOR A SEPARATION—RUMOURS THAT "GROSS CHARGES" MIGHT BE BROUGHT, INVOLVING MRS. LEIGH

Hobhouse, as we have seen, had an early inkling of the trouble which was to come; and it is not to be supposed that the brief entries in his Diary chronicle the whole of his knowledge. He had observed, indeed —or so he says—that it was "impossible for any couple to live in more apparent harmony"; but he also had reason to believe that the appearances did not reflect the realities with complete exactitude. He had heard Byron talk, though "vaguely," of breaking up his establishment, of going abroad without Lady Byron, of living alone in rooms; and he had noticed that Byron's complaints of his poverty led up to disparaging generalisations about marriage.

Speaking of his embarrassments, Byron had said that "no one could know what he had gone through," but that he "should think lightly of them were he not married." Marriage, he had added, "doubled all his misfortunes and diminished all his comforts." He summed the matter up, with apparent anxiety to do

equal justice to Lady Byron's feelings and his own by saying: "My wife is perfection itself—the best creature breathing; but mind what I say—*don't marry*." Having received these confidences, and knowing Byron well, Hobhouse must have been at least partially prepared for the subsequent developments; but their suddenness nevertheless surprised him, as they surprised everyone.

The crisis came shortly after Lady Byron's confinement, in the early days of 1816. Augusta, Byron's cousin, Captain George Byron, and Mrs. Clermont, a waiting woman who had been promoted to be Lady Byron's governess and companion, were all in the house at the time. They had witnessed some of the scenes of which we have spoken—scenes which appear to have included, if not to have been provoked by, irritating references to "the women of the theatre." Byron is said to have been aggressive in his allusions to them; and there is no evidence that Lady Byron was conciliatory on the subject. The state of his liver and of her general health would naturally have tended to accentuate any differences that arose. Things came to such a pass that, for a few days, they communicated in writing instead of by word of mouth; and Byron sent a note to Lady Byron's room.

He spoke in this note of the necessity of breaking up his establishment—a necessity of which, in view of the frequent invasions of the bailiffs, she can scarcely have then heard for the first time. He asked her to fix a date for accepting an invitation to stay with her mother at Kirkby Mallory. He proposed that that date should be as early as was compatible with her convenience, and added: "The child will, of course, accompany you." Whereto Lady Byron replied, also in writing: "I shall obey your wishes and fix the

earliest day that circumstances will admit for leaving London."

Neither letter is particularly amiable. On the other hand, neither letter suggests that Lady Byron was leaving, or being asked to leave, as the direct consequence of any specific quarrel. There was no question of a separation—only of a visit to be paid; and the dread of more "men in possession" sufficiently explains Byron's wish that it should be paid without delay. Lady Byron would obviously be more comfortable at Kirkby Mallory than in a house besieged or occupied by minions of the law. Her husband would have time, while she was there, to turn round and reconsider his position. The temporary estrangement—the interchange of heated recriminations—did not make the execution of the plan any the less desirable. On the contrary, it might afford opportunity for tempers to cool and for absence to make the heart grow fonder.

It seemed, at first, as though Lady Byron saw the matter in that light. She did not sail out of the house with indignation—she left it on ostensibly cordial terms with everybody who remained in it. She wrote to Byron in language which seemed to express fond affection, sending him news of his child, and saying that she looked forward to seeing him at Kirkby. One of the letters—there were two of them—began with the words "Dear Duck," and was signed with Lady Byron's pet name "Pippin." That was in the middle of January. There was an interval of a few days, and then it became known that Lady Noel[8] and Mrs. Clermont were in London, "for the purpose," as Hobhouse states, "of procuring means of providing a separation."

Nothing, Hobhouse insists, had happened since Lady Byron's departure to account for this sudden change of attitude. There had, in fact, hardly been time for anything to happen. That intrigue with a "woman of the theatre" which Cordy Jeaffreson believed to have been Lady Byron's determining grievance did not begin until a later date. The one thing, in short, which had happened was that Lady Byron—and Mrs. Clermont, who had accompanied her—had talked. Byron's conduct had been painted by them in lurid colours—the more lurid, no doubt, because they found listeners who were at once astounded and sympathetic. Sir Ralph and Lady Noel had, naturally, been indignant. Their daughter, they vowed, was not to be treated in this way; and they were, no doubt, the more disposed to indignation because they and Byron had not got on very well together.

Sir Ralph is commonly described in Byron's letters to his intimates as prosy and a bore. "I can't stand Lady Noel," was the reason which he gave Hobhouse for declining to visit her house. A very small spark, in such circumstances, may kindle a fierce conflagration; and it appeared to do so in this case. There was no manœuvring for position, no beating about the bush. Byron received no intimation, direct or indirect, of the plans which were being laid for his confusion. What he did receive—on February 2—was a stiffly worded ultimatum from his father-in-law.

The charges contained in the ultimatum were mostly vague; in so far as they were precise, they were untrue. "Very recently," Sir Ralph began, "circumstances have come to my knowledge"; the circumstances, so far as he disclosed them, relating to Lady Byron's "dismissal" from Byron's house, and "the treatment she experienced while in it." He went

on to propose a separation and to demand as early an answer as possible. He got his answer the same day. It was to the effect that Lady Byron had not been "dismissed" from Piccadilly Terrace, but had left London "by medical advice," and it concluded: "Till I have her express sanction of your proceedings, I shall take leave to doubt the propriety of your interference."

Mrs. Leigh wrote simultaneously to Lady Byron to inquire whether the proposal made by her father had her concurrence. The answer, dated February 3, was that it had, but that Lady Byron, owing to her "distressing situation" did not feel "capable of stating in a detailed manner the reasons which will not only justify this measure, but compel me to take it." She referred, however, to Byron's "avowed and insurmountable aversion to the married state, and the desire and determination he has expressed, ever since its commencement, to free himself from that bondage, as finding it quite insupportable"; and she added in a subsequent letter, written on the following day:

> "I hope, my dear A., that you would on no account, withhold from your brother the letter which I sent yesterday, in answer to yours, written by his desire; particularly as one which I have received from himself to-day renders it still more important that he should know the contents of that addressed to you."

That was the stage which the discussion had reached when Hobhouse, calling on Byron on February 5, heard what had happened and was taken into council. The whole thing was a mystery to him, and

a mystery on which Byron could throw but little light. In the light of the few facts before him, Lady Byron's conduct was absolutely unaccountable, inconsistent, and incoherent. The transition from the "Dearest Duck" letter to the "avowed and insurmountable aversion to the married state" letter seemed inexplicably abrupt; and, indeed, it seems so still, though later disclosures enable us, in some measure, to trace its history; the facts now known, but not then known either to Byron or to his advisers, being as follows:

1. Lady Byron had assumed that Byron was mad, and must be humoured tactfully. The "Dearest Duck" letter had been the manifestation of her tact.

2. Lady Byron had secretly instructed doctors to inquire into, and report upon, the state of Byron's mind. They had reported that he was perfectly sane; and their report had, in Lady Byron's opinion, removed all shadow of excuse for his behaviour, and decided her to leave him. Hence Lady Noel's journey to London, to consult lawyers.

3. Dr. Lushington, the lawyer consulted, had advised Lady Noel that, while the circumstances laid before him "were such as justified a separation," they were "not such as to render such a measure indispensable," and that he "deemed a reconciliation practicable."

4. Lady Byron had persisted, for reasons which she did not yet state, either to her family or to her legal advisers, in her refusal to return. Hence Sir Ralph Noel's ultimatum.

These facts, which gave Lady Byron's conduct a certain superficial coherence, were gradually elicited. For the moment, however, the only fact which Hobhouse had before him was the ultimatum and Lady Byron's endorsement of it. Of Lady Byron's reasons he knew nothing; and he had no grounds for suspecting any other motives than the word "tantrums" would cover. He proceeded, as did all Byron's supporters, on the assumption that the word "tantrums" did, in fact, cover them; and a fusillade of letters ensued. One cannot quote them all, but their contents can easily be summed up. From Byron's side there issued appeals for reconciliation, for explanations, for specific charges, for personal interviews; from Lady Byron's side there came refusals either to give reasons or to parley, and reiterated statements that her mind was unalterably made up.

"I must decline your visit and all discussion," was what Lady Byron wrote to Hobhouse on February 7; and on the same day she wrote to Byron himself: "I have finally determined on the measure of a separation.... Every expression of feeling, sincerely as it might be made, would be misplaced." The letter apparently crossed one from Byron to Sir Ralph Noel, in which he said that his house was still open to Lady Byron, that he must not debase himself to "implore as a suppliant the restoration of a reluctant wife," but that it was her duty to return, and that he knew of no reason why she should not do so. On the following day Byron addressed a further appeal to Lady Byron herself: "Will you see me—when and where you please—in whose presence you please?" and, almost as he was writing, he received another communication from Sir Ralph Noel, threatening legal proceedings "until a final separation is

effected."

February 13 brought the letter in which Lady Byron stated that she had excused Byron's conduct in the belief that he was mad, but that she could not excuse it now that she had received assurance of his sanity. She added: "I have consistently fulfilled my duty as your wife; it was too dear to be resigned till it was hopeless. Now my resolution cannot be changed." Byron rejoined on February 15: "I have invited your return; it has been refused. I have requested to know with what I am charged; it is refused."

He had, in fact, made, and was still to make, attempts, through several channels, to pin Lady Byron and her supporters to a specific allegation. Hodgson had been appealed to by Mrs. Leigh to come and help. He came, and, on the strength of the information supplied to him, wrote to Lady Byron. Two of her letters and one of his are published in his life by his son, the Reverend James T. Hodgson. Hers may be analysed as a very thinly veiled threat to bring mysterious and abominable charges unless she got her way. There is an air about the letters of conscious virtue and of consideration for the feelings of others, but the threat is unmistakably contained in them. "He *does* know—too well—what he affects to inquire," is one sentence; and another is: "The circumstances, which are of too convincing a nature, shall not be generally known whilst Lord B. allows me to spare him."

Hanson, the lawyer had, in the meantime, been sent to call on Sir Ralph Noel. He had asked for explanations, and been refused any. He had also met Lushington who had, by this time, been definitely retained by Lady Byron, and addressed some

inquiries to him. “Oh, we are not going to let you into the *forte* of our case,” had been Dr. Lushington’s reply.

It was, no doubt, a reply in strict conformity with his instructions. Lushington, as we know from a published letter from him to Lady Byron, was, at this date, personally in favour of an attempt at reconciliation. On the other hand, as is equally clear from the letters quoted in preceding paragraphs, Lady Byron had announced her intention of going into Court unless she could get her separation without doing so. Whether she had, at this date, any case—any case, that is to say, which a lawyer could take into Court with any confidence of winning it—may be questioned. The weaker her case, of course, the less likely her counsel would be to reveal the nakedness of the land prematurely by talking about it. Professional etiquette and zeal for the interests intrusted to him account quite adequately for his reticence; and there is no other influence to be drawn from it.

A little later, at an uncertain date towards the end of February, Lushington, as his letter to Lady Byron sets forth, received a visit from Lady Byron, had “additional information” imparted to him, changed his mind, and said that, if a reconciliation were still contemplated, or should thereafter be proposed, he, at any rate, should decline to render any help in bringing it about. The original “Byron mystery” was: What was the nature of that “additional information” which so suddenly altered Lushington’s attitude towards the case? That mystery has, as we shall see in a moment, been solved by Lord Lovelace. The questions left unsolved relate, not to the nature of the information but to its accuracy. Byron,

Hobhouse, and Hodgson, however, were unable to dispute its accuracy because they were left uninformed as to its nature, and could only guess the charges to be met.

The awkwardness of the situation is obvious. On the one hand, Byron could not be expected to desire, for his own sake, the society of a wife who wrote him such letters as he was now receiving from Lady Byron—to separate from her would, at any rate, be the least uncomfortable of the courses open to him. On the other hand, he could not afford to let it be said that he had consented to a separation under the threat of gross, but unspecified, accusations. The charges might be specified afterwards, whether by Lady Byron herself or by the irresponsible voice of gossip, and he would be held to have pleaded guilty to them.

That, as Byron's friends impressed upon him, could not be allowed. It could the less be allowed because rumour was already busy, and charges of a very monstrous and malignant character were being whispered. The name of Mrs. Leigh was being mixed up in the matter, and there was some reason to suppose that the stories implicating her emanated from Lady Byron; for Lady Byron, according to Hobhouse, had intimated to Mrs. Leigh that "she would be one of her evidences against her brother." That might mean much, or might mean little; but it meant enough, at any rate, to make it imperative for Byron to show fight until the air was cleared. So his friends urged, and he agreed with them, and waited for the next step to be taken by the other side.

What the other side did, in these circumstances—we are still following Hobhouse's account—was

simultaneously to appeal for pity, to bluff, and to spy out the land. They “talked of the cruelty of dragging” Lady Byron into a public Court. They sent Mrs. Clermont to Captain Byron to try to induce him to dissuade Byron from fighting. They threatened that, if he did fight, they would carry the case from Court to Court, and bury him alive under a heap of costs. But all this without effect. Sir Ralph Noel wrote to Hanson to inquire whether Byron had “come to any determination” on the proposal to separate. The reply was to the effect that “his Lordship cannot accede.”

At the end of February, that is to say, Byron still meant fighting. He said that, if Lady Byron did not proceed against him, he should proceed against her, and commence an action for the restitution of conjugal rights. His friends approved of his determination; but, at the same time, desiring to know what sort of a case would have to be met, they begged Byron to be quite candid with them and inform them, not, of course, of the nature of Lady Byron’s charges, of which he had not himself been informed, but of any good grounds of complaint which he knew himself to have given her.

CHAPTER XIX

"GROSS CHARGES" DISAVOWED BY LADY BYRON—SEPARATION AGREED TO

How far Byron was candid with his friends it is, of course, impossible to say. We know neither what he told them nor what he left untold. All that is on record is their opinion, reproduced by Hobhouse, that "the whole charge against him would amount merely to such offences as are more often committed than complained of, and, however they might be regretted as subversive of matrimonial felicity, would not render him amenable to the laws of any court, whether of justice or of equity."

That was either at the end of February or the beginning of March. Early in the latter month Byron and his friends opened further negotiations. Byron once more asked his wife to see him, and she replied: "I regret the necessity of declining an interview under existing circumstances." Then Lady Melbourne urged her to return to her husband, but only elicited an expression of wonder "that Lord Byron had not more regard for his reputation than to think of coming before the public." Then Lord Holland, who had already offered his services as a negotiator, submitted to Byron the proposed terms of a deed of separation; but Byron rejected the terms, describing the proposal as "a kind of appeal to the supposed mercenary feelings of the person to whom it was made."

There next followed interviews between Lady Byron and Mrs. Leigh, and between Lady Byron and Captain Byron. To these intermediaries Lady Byron represented that "something had passed which she had as yet told to no one, and which nothing but the absolute necessity of justifying herself in Court

should wring from her." Whereto Byron replied that "it was absolutely false that he had been guilty of any enormity—that nothing could or would be proved by anybody against him, and that he was prepared for anything that could be said in any Court." He allowed Hobhouse to offer on his behalf "any guarantees short of separation"; but he made it quite clear that he was not frightened, and would not yield to threats.

Upon that Lady Byron changed her tone. Her next letter did not so much claim a separation as beg for one. "After your repeated assertions," she wrote, "that, when convinced my conduct has not been influenced by others, you should not oppose my wishes, I am yet disposed to hope these assertions will be realised." There, at last, was an appeal to which it was possible for Byron to respond—on terms; not on Lady Byron's terms, of course—but on his own. He had begun the negotiations by declining to "implore as a suppliant the return of a reluctant wife." Nothing had happened in the course of the negotiations to persuade him that he would live more happily with Lady Byron than without her. Indeed, it was now more evident than ever that to separate was the only way of making the best of a bad job.



Lady Byron.

At the same time it was equally evident that he must stand out for terms. Mud had been thrown; and while there had been no specific charges, there had been dark hints of monstrous crimes. It was necessary, therefore, to insist that Lady Byron should give “a positive disavowal of all the grosser charges” which had been suggested without being positively preferred; and Hobhouse proceeded to continue the

negotiations on those lines.

There were, in fact, two "gross" charges to be faced. One of these concerned Mrs. Leigh, and the other did not. On the nature of the latter charge it is quite superfluous to speculate. Whatever it may have been, no evidence was offered in support of it at the time, and no evidence bearing on it has since been brought to light. It was not maintained; it was not revived; it has been forgotten. The rules of controversy not only warrant us in passing it over, but bid us do so. The Byron mystery, wherever it may be, is not there. Though all the "gross" charges had, at the moment, to be dealt with collectively, the only charge which mattered was the charge in which Mrs. Leigh was involved.

Lady Byron, when challenged with the charges, at first equivocated. She was quite willing, she said, to declare that the rumours indicated "had not emanated from her or from her family." That, naturally, was not good enough for Byron and his friends. What they required was that Lady Byron should state "not only that the rumours did not originate with her or her family, but that the charges which they involved made no part of her charges against Lord Byron." A statement to that effect was drawn up for her to sign, and she signed it. The signed statement, witnessed by Byron's cousin, Wilmot Horton, was shown to Hobhouse, and was left in Wilmot Horton's hands until the settlement should be completed. The Byron mystery, such as it is, or was, only exists—or existed—because Byron and Wilmot Horton fell out, and the latter, withdrawing from the negotiations, mislaid or lost the document.

That Lady Byron did sign the document, however, and that its contents were as stated, no doubt whatever can be entertained. Hobhouse's subsequent evidence on the subject is supported by the correspondence which passed at the time. He referred to the document, with full particularity, in a letter which he wrote Lady Byron, and which has been published; and Lady Byron, in her answer, did not deny either that she had signed, or that she was bound by its contents. The trouble arose because, after having signed it, she behaved as if she had not done so, and, by her conduct, gave the lie to her pledged word that "neither of the specified charges would have formed part of her allegations if she had come into Court."

This trouble, however, was not immediate. Lady Byron did not begin to talk till some time afterwards: and at first she only talked to people who had sense enough to keep her secret, if not to rate it at its true value. Not until some years after her death did a foolish woman in whom she had confided publish her story to the world in a book filled from cover to cover with gross and even ludicrous inaccuracies. When that happened, the old scandal which the book revived was mistaken for a new scandal freshly brought to light; and there was a great outcry about "shocking revelations" and much angry beating of the air by violent controversialists on both sides. All that it is necessary to say on that branch of the subject shall be said in a moment. What we have to note now is that Byron did not, and could not, foresee that that particular battle would rage over his reputation.

He admitted to his friends, and he had previously admitted to Lady Byron, that "he had been guilty of

infidelity with one female." He was under the impression that she had given him "a plenary pardon"; but the offence nevertheless gave her a moral—if not also a legal—right to her separation, if she insisted on it. Of the "gross" charges he only knew that they had never been formally pressed, and that they had been formally repudiated. So far as they were concerned, therefore, his honour was perfectly clear; and there remained no reason why he should not append his signature to the proposed deed of separation, as soon as its exact terms were agreed upon. The details still awaiting adjustment were mainly of the financial order. They were adjusted, and then Byron signed.

It may be that he signed the more readily because the rumours had been tracked to another source, and disavowed there also. Lady Caroline Lamb has often been accused of putting them in circulation. She heard, at the time, that she had been so accused, and wrote to Byron to repudiate the charge. "They tell me," she wrote, "that you have accused me of having spread injurious reports against you. Had you the heart to say this? I do not greatly believe it." Very possibly the receipt of that letter strengthened Byron's resolution to sign. At all events he did sign, and then a storm burst about his head:

> "I need not tell you of the obloquy and opprobrium that were cast upon my name when our separation was made public. I once made a list from the Journals of the day of the different worthies, ancient and modern, to whom I was compared. I remember a few: Nero, Apicius, Epicurus, Caligula, Heliogabalus, Henry the Eighth, and lastly the ——. All my former friends, even my

> cousin George Byron, who had been brought up with me, and whom I loved as a brother, took my wife's part. He followed the stream when it was strongest against me, and can never expect anything from me: he shall never touch a sixpence of mine. I was looked upon as the worst of husbands, the most abandoned and wicked of men, and my wife as a suffering angel—an incarnation of all the virtues and perfections of the sex. I was abused in the public prints, made the common talk of private companies, hissed as I went to the House of Lords, insulted in the streets, afraid to go to the theatre, whence the unfortunate Mrs. Mardyn had been driven with insult. The *Examiner* was the only paper that dared say a word in my defence, and Lady Jersey the only person in the fashionable world that did not look upon me as a monster."
>
> "I was accused of every monstrous vice by public rumour and private rancour; my name which had been a knightly or a noble one since my fathers helped to conquer the kingdom for William the Norman, was tainted. I felt that, if what was whispered, and muttered, and murmured was true, I was unfit for England; if false, England was unfit for me."

The former of these passages is from Medwin's "Conversations"; the latter is written by Byron's own hand. There is very little to be added to the picture which they draw. Byron discovered that, for a man of his notoriety, there was no such thing as private life. His business was assumed to be everybody's

business. In his case, just as in the Dreyfus case, at a later date, all the world took a side, and those who knew least of the rights of the case were the most vehement in their indignation.

Broadly speaking one may say that his friends were for him but his acquaintances were against him, and the mob took the part of his acquaintances. Hobhouse, Hodgson, Moore, Rogers, Leigh Hunt, and Scrope Davies never faltered in their allegiance. On the other hand, many social leaders cut him; the journalists showered abuse on him as spitefully as if they felt that they had "failed in literature" through his fault; the religious seized the opportunity to punish him for what they considered the immoral tone of his writings; the pit and gallery at Drury Lane classed him with the villain of the melodrama who presumes to lay his hand upon a woman otherwise than in the way of kindness. It was a combination as irresistible as it was unforeseen, and he had to yield to it.

Lady Jersey, as he told Medwin, did her best for him. He and Mrs. Leigh were both present at a reception specially given in his honour—a demonstration that one social leader at least attached no importance and gave no credence to the scandals which besmeared his name. Miss Mercer, afterwards Madame de Flahault and, in her own right, Lady Keith, made a point of greeting him with frank cordiality as if nothing had happened. Probably the specific scandal which Lady Byron had been compelled to disavow was never taken very seriously outside Lady Byron's immediate circle. Certainly it was not the scandal which aroused the indignation of the multitude. For them, the *causa teterrima belli* was Mrs. Mardyn, the actress, whom Byron hardly knew by sight; and the

gravamen of their charge against him was that he had treated a woman badly.

That was enough for them; and their indignation was too much for him. Now that the deed of separation had been signed, it was too late for him to fight. The "grosser charges" against him were charges of which he could not prove publication—charges which had been withdrawn. Sneers and innuendoes did not, any more than hoots and hisses, furnish him with any definite allegation on which he could join issue. The whispered charge involving his sister was not one which he could formally contradict unless it were formally preferred. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse* would have been quoted against him if he had done so; and Mrs. Leigh's good name as well as his own would have been at the mercy of the mud-slingers. All things considered, it seemed that the best course open to him was to travel, and let the hostile rumours die away, instead of keeping them alive by argument.

He went, and they died away and were forgotten. We will follow him to the continent presently, and see how nearly persecution drove him to degradation, and how, under the influence of the blow which threatened to crush him, his genius took fresh flights, more hardy than of old, and more sublime. But first we must turn back, and face the scandal in the form in which Mrs. Beecher Stowe and Lord Lovelace have successively given it two fresh leases of life, and see whether it is not possible to blow it into the air so effectively that no admirer of Byron's genius need ever feel uneasy about it again.

CHAPTER XX

REVIVAL OF THE BYRON SCANDAL BY MRS. BEECHER STOWE AND THE LATE LORD LOVELACE

The Byron scandal slowly fell asleep, and was allowed to slumber for about half a century. Even the publication of Moore's Life did not awaken it. People took sides, indeed, as they always do, some throwing the blame on the husband, and others on the wife; but the view that, whoever was to blame, the causes of the separation were "too simple to be easily found out" prevailed.

Forces, however, making for the revival of the scandal were nevertheless at work. Byron smarted under social ostracism and resented it. Though Lady Byron had never made any formal charge to which he could reply, but had, on the contrary, formally retracted all "gross" charges, he continued to be embittered by suggestions of mysterious iniquities, and his anger found expression alike in his letters and in his poems. To a certain extent he defended himself by taking the offensive. He caused notes on his case to be privately distributed. He wrote "at" Lady Byron, in the Fourth Canto of "Childe Harold," in "Don Juan," and elsewhere. A good deal of his correspondence, printed by Moore, expressed his opinion of her in terms very far from flattering.

Under these combined influences public opinion

veered round—the more readily because Byron was held to have made ample atonement for his faults, whatever they might have been, by sacrificing his life in the cause of Greek independence. Lady Byron was now thought, not indeed to have erred in any technical sense, but to have made an undue fuss about very little, and to have been most unwomanly in her frigid consciousness of rectitude. The world, in short, was more certain now that she had been "heartless" than that she had been "always in the right."

Naturally, her temptation to "answer back" was strong. She could not very well answer back by preferring any monstrous indictment in public. That course was not only to be avoided in her daughter's interest, but might also have involved her in an action for defamation of character on the part of Mrs. Leigh—an action which she could not have met with any adequate defence. Of that risk, indeed, she had been warned by her friend Colonel Doyle, in a letter printed in "Astarte" to which it will presently be necessary to return—a letter in which she had been urgently recommended to "act as if a time might possibly arise when it might be necessary for you to justify yourself." But if she could not answer back in public, at least she could answer back in private.

She did so. That is to say, she talked—mostly to sympathetic women who were more or less discreet, but also, in her later years to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who did not so much as know what discretion was. The story of which Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe had already received hints from the women whose discretion was comparative was ultimately told to her, whose indiscretion was absolute, by Lady Byron herself. She remained as discreet as the rest—that is

to say, more or less discreet—during Lady Byron's life, and for some time afterwards. But when the Countess Guiccioli wrote a book about Byron in which Lady Byron was disparaged, she could restrain herself no longer. In support of Lady Byron's story she had no evidence except Lady Byron's word. She did not know—and she did not trouble to inquire—what evidence against it might exist. She did not pause to ask herself whether her own recollection might not be at fault concerning a story which she had heard thirteen years before. It was enough for her, apparently, that Lady Byron was a religious woman, and that Byron, on his own showing, had lived "a man's life." That sufficed, in her view, wherever there was a conflict of statements, to demonstrate that Byron was a liar, and that Lady Byron spoke the truth. So she plunged into the fray, and, with a great flourish of trumpets, published Lady Byron's story in "Macmillan's Magazine." When the "Quarterly Review" had, in so far as it is ever possible to prove a negative, disproved the story, she repeated it with embellishments in a book entitled: "Lady Byron Vindicated: A History of the Byron Controversy from its Beginning in 1816 to the Present Time."

The essence of Mrs. Stowe's story is contained in this report of Lady Byron's conversation:

> "There was something awful to me in the intensity of repressed emotion which she showed as she proceeded. The great fact upon which all turned was stated in words that were unmistakable:
>
> "'He was guilty of incest with his sister.'"

There is the charge. Turning over the pages in quest

of the evidence in support of it, we find this:

> "She said that one night, in her presence, he treated his sister with a liberty which both shocked and astonished her. Seeing her amazement and alarm he came up to her, and said, in a sneering tone, 'I suppose you perceive *you* are not wanted here. Go to your own room, and leave us alone. We can amuse ourselves better without you.'
>
> "She said, 'I went to my room trembling. I went down on my knees and prayed to my heavenly Father to have mercy on them. I thought: What shall I do?'
>
> "I remember, after this, a pause in the conversation, during which she seemed struggling with thoughts and emotions; and, for my part, I was unable to utter a word or ask a question."

No more than that. This *ex parte* interpretation of a foolish conjugal quarrel of forty years before, admittedly untested by any demand for particulars, was absolutely the sole piece of testimony which Mrs. Stowe adduced when she set out to blast Byron's reputation. The rest of the book consists of pious and sentimental out-pourings, vulgar abuse of Byron, and equally vulgar eulogy of his wife; the two passages cited being the only passages material to the issue. There was nothing in writing for her to quote—no case which a respectable lawyer would have taken into Court—no case that would not have been laughed out of Court within five minutes if it had ever got so far.

The tribunal of public opinion did, in fact, laugh the

case out of Court at the time. It was “snowed under,” partly by laughter, and partly by indignation and the British feeling in favour of fair play; and it remained so buried for nearly forty years. Biographers could afford to scout it as “monstrous” without troubling to confute it. Sir Leslie Stephen, in the “Dictionary of National Biography,” treated it as an hallucination to which Lady Byron had fallen a victim through brooding over her grievances in solitude.

One would be glad if one could still take that tone towards it; but Lord Lovelace has made it impossible to do so. Mrs. Stowe, as a mischief-making meddler, interfering with matters which did not concern her, and about which she was obviously very ill informed, had not even a *primâ facie* title to be taken seriously. The case of Lord Lovelace was different. He was Byron’s grandson and the custodian of Lady Byron’s strong-box. He affected not merely to assert but to argue. He produced from the strong-box documents which he was pleased to call proofs. A good many people, not having seen them, probably still believe that they are proofs. They cannot be waived on one side like Mrs. Stowe’s unsupported allegations, but must be dealt with; and the whole question of the charge which they are alleged to substantiate must, of course, be dealt with simultaneously.

And first, as the documents laid before us are miscellaneous, we must distinguish between those of them which count and those which do not count. Some of the contents of the strong-box, it seems, are merely “statements” in Lady Byron’s handwriting. These are only referred to by Lord Lovelace, but not printed. Not having been produced, they cannot be criticised; but there are, nevertheless, two comments which it is legitimate to make. In the first place, an

ex parte statement, though admissible in evidence for what it may be worth, is not the same thing as proof. In the second place, if the statements had been of a nature to strengthen the case which Lord Lovelace was trying to make out, instead of merely embellishing it, they would not have been held back. Their absence from the *dossier* need not, therefore, embarrass us; and we need, in fact, be the less embarrassed by it because it was already perfectly well known that Lady Byron was in the habit of writing out statements, and had shown them to impartial persons who had taken the measure of their value. That fact is set forth in the Rev. Frederick Arnold's Life of Robertson of Brighton, who, as is well known, was, for a considerable time, Lady Byron's religious adviser.

> "A remarkable incident," writes Mr. Arnold, "may be mentioned in illustration of the relations with Lord Byron. Lady Byron had accumulated a great mass of documentary evidence, papers and letters, which were supposed to constitute a case completely exculpatory of herself and condemnatory of Byron. She placed all this printed matter in the hands of a well-known individual, who was then resident at Brighton, and afterwards removed into the country. This gentleman went carefully through the papers, and was utterly astonished at the utter want of criminatory matter against Byron. He was not indifferent to the *éclat* or emolument of editing such memoirs. But he felt that this was a brief which he was unable to hold, and accordingly returned all the papers to Lady Byron."

That comment on the "statements," significant in itself, is doubly significant when taken in conjunction with Lord Lovelace's suppression of them; and we may fairly consider the case without further reference to them, and without an apprehension that a surprise will be sprung from that source to upset the conclusions at which we arrive. Lord Lovelace did not rest his case on them, but on quite other documents, which we will proceed to examine after first saying the few words which need to be said in order to clear the air.

One point, indeed, Lord Lovelace has made successfully. He has proved that the gross and mysterious charge which Lady Byron preferred (or rather hinted at while refusing to prefer it) at the time of the separation was, in fact, identical with the charge formulated in Mrs. Stowe's book. A contemporary memorandum to that effect, in Lushington's handwriting, signed by Lady Byron, and witnessed by Lushington, Wilmot Horton, and Colonel Doyle, is printed in "Astarte." To that extent the so-called Byron mystery is now solved, once and for all. The statement set forth in that memorandum, and afterwards repeated to Mrs. Stowe, was the statement on the strength of which Lushington declared, as has already been mentioned, that he could not be a party to any attempt to effect a reconciliation.

So far so good. The probability of these facts could have been inferred from Hobhouse's narrative; their certainty is now established. We now know of what Byron was accused—behind his back; we also know of what Mrs. Leigh was accused—behind her back. But—and the "but" is most important—the memorandum contains this remarkable sentence:

> "It will be observed that this Paper does not contain nor pretend to contain any of the grounds which gave rise to the suspicion which has existed and still continues to exist in Lady B.'s mind."

Which is to say that Lady Byron, on her own showing, and that of her legal advisers, was acting not on evidence but on "suspicion." In this document there is not even so much evidence as was set before Mrs. Stowe, or any suggestion that any evidence worthy of the name exists. The quest for proof must be pursued elsewhere.

But where?

Lord Lovelace has not shown us. The document in which it is expressly set forth that none of the statements contained in it are of the nature of proofs is the only contemporary document which he cites; for the scrap of a letter which he quotes from Mrs. George Lamb only proves, if indeed it proves anything, that Mrs. Lamb had heard what Lady Byron said. Further on in his book, indeed, Lord Lovelace represents that Mrs. Leigh subsequently, under pressure, confessed her guilt to Lady Byron; but concerning that representation two things shall be demonstrated in the next chapter.

In the first place Mrs. Leigh did not confess—the alleged confession having no bearing whatsoever on the matter which we are now considering. In the second place the inherent probabilities of the case and the circumstantial evidence which illuminates it are such that, even if Mrs. Leigh had confessed, it would be impossible to believe her on her oath.

CHAPTER XXI

INHERENT IMPROBABILITY OF THE CHARGES AGAINST AUGUSTA LEIGH—THE ALLEGATION THAT SHE "CONFESSED"—THE PROOF THAT SHE DID NOTHING OF THE KIND

First as to the inherent probabilities:

The accusation, as elaborated by Lord Lovelace, is, it must be observed, that Byron had yielded to an unnatural passion for his sister at a period anterior to his marriage—the period covered by the Journal from which we have quoted, and by those mysteriously morbid and gloomy poems of which "The Bride of Abydos" and "Lara" are the most remarkable. This passion, according to Lord Lovelace, was the cause of the spiritual "crisis" through which poems and Journal alike prove him to have passed. When Byron writes that "The Bride" was "written to drive my thoughts from the recollection of * * *," Lord Lovelace interprets him to mean that it was written to drive his thoughts from the recollection of Mrs. Leigh. Hers, he invites us to believe, was the "dear sacred name" which was to "rest ever unrevealed."

That theory is not only nonsense, but arrant

nonsense—obviously so to readers who are familiar with Byron's letters, and demonstrably so to those who are not. All that can be said in favour of the view is that some of the passages in some of the poems are so obscure that they can be tortured into accord with the most preposterous hypothesis. On the other hand, while there is no direct evidence on the subject at all, there is conclusive circumstantial evidence which effectually disposes of Lord Lovelace's calumnious assertion—evidence, happily, so simple that one almost can sum it up in a sentence.

Throughout the whole of the "crisis" in question Byron was in correspondence with Mrs. Leigh; and a great deal of the correspondence has been published. The letters are letters in which Byron takes his sister into his confidence. We find him writing to her, first about his "affairs" with Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady Oxford, and then about his desolating passion for another lady whom we have seen reason to identify with Mary Chaworth. Nor does it matter, for the purposes of the present argument, whether that identification is correct or not. The solid fact, in any case, remains that, at the very time when Lord Lovelace represents Byron as engaged in an intrigue with Augusta Leigh, he was, in fact, writing to her to apologise for his "long silence," and attributing that silence to trouble in connection with another lady: "It is not Lady Caroline, nor Lady Oxford; *but perhaps you may guess*, and, if you do, do not tell."

There are other letters to the same effect, but that letter should suffice. No sane man will believe Byron to have been devoured by a guilty passion for the woman to whom he confided secrets of that sort; and, if there were any disposition to entertain the

belief were still harboured, it could hardly fail to be expelled by an examination of the letters which passed between Lady Byron and Mrs. Leigh, and between Mrs. Leigh and Francis Hodgson.

Mrs. Leigh had been with Lady Byron during her confinement. There had been no quarrel between them, and no suspicion or suggestion of a quarrel. When Lady Byron left Piccadilly Terrace for Kirkby Mallory, Mrs. Leigh continued, with her knowledge, and without any hint of an objection, to stay in her brother's house. Even when Lady Byron communicated her decision not to return to her husband, she expressed neither surprise at Mrs. Leigh's remaining there, nor desire for her departure. On the contrary, at the very time when she was insisting upon separation, and hinting at charges too awful to be preferred unless the particulars were dragged from her, she was corresponding with Mrs. Leigh, not merely on terms of ordinary politeness, but on terms of confidential intimacy and cordial affection—addressing her as "My dearest A.," "My dearest Sis," "My dearest Gus," &c., &c.

A long series of these letters is printed in Mr. Murray's latest edition of Byron's Works. Readers who desire full particulars must be referred to them. A few sentences only need be given here, as an indication of their tone:

> "If all the world had told me you were doing me an injury, I *ought not* to have believed it. My chief feeling, therefore, in relation to you and myself must be that I *have* wronged you, and that you have never wronged me!"
>
> "I know you feel for me as I do for you—and perhaps I am better understood than I think.

> You have been ever since I knew you my best comforter, and will so remain, unless you grow tired of the office, which may well be."
>
> "The present sufferings of all *may* yet be repaid in blessings. Don't despair absolutely, dearest; and leave me but enough of your interest to afford you any consolation by partaking that sorrow which I am most unhappy to cause you thus unintentionally.... Heaven knows you have considered me more than one in a thousand would have done."
>
> "I am anxious to acquit you of all misrepresentation, and myself of having supposed that you had misrepresented.... I cannot give you pain without feeling yet more myself."
>
> "My dearest A., it is my great comfort that you are in Piccadilly."

Some of these letters were written at a time when Lady Byron believed her husband to be mad. All of them were written at a time when she was accusing him of improper relations with her correspondent—as is established beyond dispute by her signed statement, published in "Astarte." The excerpt printed last was written at the time when she professed to entertain both beliefs. It amounts, when analysed, to an expression of gratification that her sister-in-law, to whom she claims to be deeply attached, is in a position to continue incestuous and adulterous intercourse with a raving maniac. It is incredible, of course, that she can either have felt, or intended to express, any such gratification at any such state of things. The letter is explicable on one

hypothesis, and one only: that Lady Byron herself did not really believe the story which she had told to her advisers.

We have already seen—from the wording of Lady Byron's statement and from her correspondence with Colonel Doyle—that she had no proofs of her story. We have also seen that, when Byron's friends tried to pin her to the story, she disavowed it. The conclusion that she did not even believe it at the time when she told it comes as a fitting climax; and it needs but little conjecture or imagination to divine her motives and give coherence to the narrative of her proceedings.

She had come to hate her husband, and had resolved to separate from him at all costs. Such hatreds are sometimes conceived by women without adequate cause, just before and just after pregnancy. One suspects that pathological explanation, though one does not know enough of the facts to insist upon it. The hatred, at any rate, was there, impelling Lady Byron to seek a separation, and she proceeded to take advice. Probably she was advised that her case was too weak to be taken into Court with confidence; and she certainly was advised that reconciliation was preferable to separation. The only way of securing the firm support of her own friends was to lay fresh facts before them.

That is the stage of the proceedings at which we are told that fresh facts came to her knowledge. But the alleged facts were only treated as facts for the purposes of argument. They were scandals—the scandals implicating Mrs. Leigh, and launched, as is believed, by Lady Caroline Lamb, who subsequently disavowed them as explicitly as Lady Byron herself.

In order to make sure of her separation Lady Byron adopted those scandals and laid them before Lushington. Lushington may or may not have believed them. So long, however, as he remained in charge of the case he was bound to behave as if he did; and the nature of the charges was such that, even if he only believed them in the sense in which a barrister is required to believe the contents of his brief, he was obviously bound to take the line that they precluded all idea of a reconciliation.

He did take that line; and Lady Byron got her separation. She was so eager to get it that she first made abominable charges against her husband in order to win the sympathy of her own friends, and then withdrew them in order to disarm Byron's friends. All this without informing Mrs. Leigh that her name was being mixed up in the matter, and without withdrawing from Mrs. Leigh's society. Ultimately, no doubt, she did come to believe the story which she had first circulated and then disavowed. It is hardly to be questioned that she believed it at the time when she told it to Mrs. Beecher Stowe. But she clearly did not believe it at the time when she made use of it; and one can only attribute her final belief in it to a kind of auto-suggestion, induced by dwelling on her grievances, and akin to the process by which George IV. persuaded himself that he had taken part in the Battle of Waterloo.

That is the most plausible supposition as to the motives inspiring Lady Byron's conduct; and there is nothing except the motives themselves which stands in need of explanation. From Lushington's action no inference whatever is to be drawn, for it was the only action which the rules of professional etiquette

left open to him; and the Byron question is not: On what evidence did Lady Byron act as she did? It is merely: Why did Lady Byron act as she did without any evidence at all? It is so small a question that, having offered a tentative solution, we may fairly leave it and glance at Mrs. Leigh's correspondence with Hodgson.

Hodgson, as has already been mentioned was brought in by Mrs. Leigh as a peacemaker. The letters which she wrote to him before, during, and after the quarrel appear in the Life of Hodgson by his son, published in 1878. They are too long to be given at length; but their bearing on the issue, which no one who takes the trouble to read them will dispute, must be briefly stated.

In the first place they, most obviously, are not the letters of a guilty woman, or of a woman who feels herself in any way personally implicated in the dispute which she seeks to compose. Every line in them demonstrates, not merely that the writer is conscious of rectitude, but also that the writer is ignorant that she herself is, or can be, the object of sinister suspicion. They are just the flurried letters of a simple body who feels that circumstances have laid upon her shoulders a heavier load of responsibility than they can bear, but would rather be helped to bear the burden than run away from it; and it is a fair summary of them to say that they exonerate Byron by exonerating the alleged accomplice in his crime.

In the second place the letters show Mrs. Leigh, ignorant, indeed, of the specific enormities with which Byron is charged, but well aware of certain circumstances which had made Byron's marriage a

dubious experiment. In the earlier letters, indeed those circumstances are only hinted at obscurely, but in the later letters the meaning of the hints is made quite clear. For instance:

> "I assure you I don't conclude hastily on this subject, and will own to you, what I would not scarcely to any other person that I HAD *many fears* and much anxiety founded upon many causes and circumstances of which I cannot *write*. Thank God! that they do not appear likely to be realised."

That was written during the honeymoon. In letters written shortly after the honeymoon there are similar vague expressions of anxiety. It is not until we come to the letters written after the separation that we begin to get sight of the particulars; but then we light upon this significant passage:

> "I am afraid to open my lips, though all I say to *you* I know is secure from misinterpretation. On the opinions expressed by Mr. M. I am *not surprised*. I have seen letters written *to him* which could not but give rise to such, or confirm them. If I may give you *mine*, it is that *in his own mind* there *were* and *are* recollections, fatal to his peace, and which would have prevented his being happy with any woman whose excellence equalled or approached that of Lady B., from the consciousness of being unworthy of it. Nothing could or can remedy this fatal cause but the consolations to be derived from religion, of which, alas! dear Mr. H., our beloved B. is, I fear, destitute."

The idea that the fatal recollections here deplored are recollections of guilty acts in which the writer of the letter was a partner would be too preposterous to be treated with respect even if we did not know what the nature of those recollections was; but, as a matter of fact, a later passage in the same letter supplies the information:

> "I am glad you were rather agreeably surprised in the poems.... Of course *you* know to whom the 'Dream' alludes, Mrs. C ——."

And there, of course, the truth is out. Mrs. C—— is, and can be no one else than, Mary Chaworth. The "causes too simple to be found out" had to do with Byron's imperishable passion for the lady whom we have seen his wife calling a "cat." Byron could not live happily with Lady Byron because he could not forget Mary Chaworth—and Lady Byron knew it.

Consequently she set her heart upon obtaining a separation, and, in order to make sure of that separation, "put up" the story, suggested by Lady Caroline Lamb's poisonous tongue. The whole business is as simple as all that; and the subject might properly be dropped at that point if it were not for Lord Lovelace's assertion that papers in his hands demonstrated that Mrs. Leigh had "confessed."

But the so-called confession of Augusta Leigh is like the so-called confession of Captain Dreyfus. We are told that it exists; and when our curiosity has been thus aroused we are told that it is not worth while to produce it. Augusta, says Lord Lovelace, "admitted everything in her letters of June, July, and August, 1816"; and then he goes on to say: "It is unnecessary to produce them here, as their contents are confirmed and made clear by the correspondence of 1819 in another chapter." But when we turn to the correspondence of 1819, we find that no confession is contained in them. The most that one can say is that, the language of the letters being sometimes enigmatic, and the subjects to which they relate being uncertain, one or two passages in them might conceivably be read as referring to a confession, if one knew that a confession had been made. Even on that hypothesis, however, they might just as easily be read as referring to something else; and the real clue to their meaning may, almost certainly, be found in a letter which Lord Lovelace prints in the chapter entitled "Some Correspondence of Augusta Byron."

The letter[9] in question is a love letter. It begins "My dearest Love" and ends "Ever Dearest." Lord Lovelace prints it as addressed by Lord Byron to Mrs. Leigh in May 1819. It is a letter, however, in which

both the signature and the address are erased; but though there is no great reason for doubting that Byron was the writer, there is no reason whatever for believing that Mrs. Leigh was the recipient. Indeed, one has only to place it side by side with the letters which we actually know Byron to have written to Mrs. Leigh a little before May 1819, and a little afterwards, in order to be positive that she was not; and one has only to remember that Byron still sometimes wrote to Mary Chaworth, and that his correspondence passed through his sister's hands, in order to satisfy oneself whose letter it was that Lord Lovelace found among Lord Byron's papers. So that our conclusion must be:

1. That Lord Lovelace's most substantial piece of evidence against Mrs. Leigh is a letter[9] which though it passed through her hands, was really written to Mary Chaworth.

2. That the alleged confession does not exist —for if it did exist, Lord Lovelace would have printed it.

And we may go further, and say, with confidence, not only that the alleged confession does not exist at the present time, but that it never did exist; for even that conclusion follows irresistibly from the known circumstances of the final meeting between Lady Byron and Mrs. Leigh, at Reigate, in the presence of the Rev. F. W. Robertson, in 1851.

They had remained friends until 1830, and had then quarrelled, not about Byron, but about the appointment of a new trustee under a settlement. After that, they had ceased to see each other; and the Reigate interview, of which Robertson drew up a memorandum, was avowedly and admittedly

arranged because Lady Byron desired, and expected, to receive a confession before a witness of unimpeachable integrity. Nothing is more obvious than that Lady Byron would have had no need to solicit a verbal confession in 1851 if she had succeeded in extracting a written confession in 1816; and it is common ground that, in 1851, Mrs. Leigh not only confessed nothing, but denied that she had anything to confess.

The whole story of the confession, therefore, vanishes like smoke; and one is free, at last, to quit this painful part of the subject. It was necessary to dwell on it carefully and at length on account of the sophistical cobwebs spun round it by Lord Lovelace's awkward hands and because, while justice injoined the vindication of Lord Byron, his biographer could not let any prudish scruples or false delicacy withhold him from the task of definitely clearing the memory of Byron's sister from the shameful aspersions cast upon it, by Byron's grandson. But one, nevertheless, gets away from it with relief, and returns with a sense of recovered freedom to the facts of Byron's career at the time when the storm broke about his head and drove him from the country.

CHAPTER XXII

BYRON'S DEPARTURE FOR THE CONTINENT—HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH JANE CLAIRMONT

Macaulay has described, in that picturesque style of his, how, just as Byron "woke up one morning and found himself famous," so the British public woke up one morning and found itself virtuous, with the result that Byron was hooted and hounded out of England. The picture, like all Macaulay's pictures, was overdrawn and over-coloured. The life of the country, and even of the capital, went on pretty much as usual in spite of Byron's dissensions with his wife; and Byron himself kept up appearances fairly well, going to the theatre, entertaining Leigh Hunt, Kinnaird, and other friends at dinner, and corresponding with Murray about the publication of his poems. But, nevertheless, many circumstances combined to make him feel uncomfortable.

Invitations ceased to be showered upon him; and "gross charges" continued to be whispered in spite of Lady Byron's disavowal. The grounds of the separation not being known, every one was free to conjecture his own solution of the mystery. There seemed little doubt, at any rate, that Byron had forsaken his lawful wife's society for that of the nymphs of Drury Lane; and it was quite certain that he had failed to pay the Duchess of Devonshire her rent. The only possible reply to these allegations was that they were no part of the business of the people who made such a fuss about them. The fuss being made, the most reasonable course was to go abroad until the hubbub ceased.

It was no case, as Byron's enemies have said, of

running away to avoid an investigation into his conduct—investigation had been challenged, and all the grave charges had been withdrawn. They had, indeed, by a breach of faith, been secretly kept alive; but they had not reappeared in such shape and circumstances that action could be taken on them; and Byron could not be expected to formulate them himself, merely for the purpose of denying them. His threat, a little later, to appeal to the Courts for an injunction to restrain Lady Byron from taking his daughter out of England as he had heard that she proposed to do, amply showed that he had no fear of any shameful disclosures; but he had Mrs. Leigh's reputation as well as his own to think of; and it was better for her sake as well as his that he should desist from bandying words with her calumniators. Moreover it was not only his calumniators who were making things unpleasant for him. His creditors were also joining in the hue and cry and multiplying his motives for retiring; so he resolved to go, attended by three servants and the Italian physician, Polidori.

Rogers paid him a farewell visit on April 22; and Mr. and Mrs. Kinnaird called the same evening, bringing, as Hobhouse tells us, "a cake and two bottles of champagne." On the following morning the party were up at six and off at half-past nine for Dover; Hobhouse riding with Polidori in Scrope Davies' carriage, and Byron, with Scrope Davies, in his own new travelling coach, modelled on that of Napoleon, containing a bed, a library, and a dinner-service, specially built for him at a cost of £500. A crowd gathered to watch the departure—a crowd which Hobhouse feared might prove dangerous, but which, in fact, was only inquisitive. The bailiffs arrived ten minutes afterwards and "seized everything," with expressions of regret that they had not been in time

to seize the coach as well. Even cage-birds and a squirrel were taken away by them.

This news having been brought by Fletcher, the valet, who followed the party, the coach was hustled on board the packet to be safe—a most wise precaution seeing that there was a day's delay before it started; and Hobhouse continues:

> "April 25. Up at eight, breakfasted; all on board except the company. The captain said he could not wait, and Byron would not get up a moment sooner. Even the serenity of Scrope was disturbed.... The bustle kept Byron in spirits, but he looked affected when the packet glided off.... The dear fellow pulled off his cap and waved it to me. I gazed until I could not distinguish him any longer. God bless him for a gallant spirit and a kind one!"

And then:

> "Went to London.... Told there was a row expected at the theatre, Douglas K. having received fifteen anonymous letters stating that Mrs. Mardyn would be hissed on Byron's account."

This gives us, of course, the point of view of the populace—or perhaps one should say of the middle classes. They, it is evident, knew nothing of any specially gross or unspeakable charges against Byron, but were satisfied to turn the hose of virtuous indignation on him because, instead of managing Drury Lane in the sole interest of dramatic art, he had availed himself of opportunities and yielded to temptations. And so no doubt he had, though not

exactly in such circumstances as the populace supposed or in connection with the particular lady whose guilt the populace had hastily assumed.

The popular indictment, indeed, included at least three glaring errors of fact. In the first place the partner of Byron's latest passion (if passion be the word) was not Mrs. Mardyn, but Miss Jane Clairmont. In the second place his relations with Miss Clairmont had nothing whatever to do with his separation from Lady Byron, because he did not make Miss Clairmont's acquaintance until after Lady Byron had left him. In the third place it was not Byron who pursued Miss Clairmont with his attentions, but Miss Clairmont who threw herself at Byron's head.

Jane Clairmont was, as is well known, sister by affinity to Mary Godwin who was then living with Shelley and was afterwards married to him. She had accompanied Shelley and Mary on their first trip to Switzerland in 1814, and had subsequently stayed with them in various lodgings. In the impending summer she was to go to Switzerland with them again, and Byron was to meet her there, whether accidentally or on purpose. In the early biographies, indeed, the meeting figures as accidental; but the later biographers knew better, and the complete story can be pieced together from a bundle of letters included in the Murray MSS., and the statement which Miss Clairmont herself made in her old age to Mr. William Graham, who travelled all the way to Florence to see her, and, after her death, reported her conversations in the *Nineteenth Century*.

"When I was a very young girl," Miss Clairmont told Mr. Graham, "Byron was the rage." She spoke of the

"troubling morbid obsession" which he exercised "over the youth of England of both sexes," and insisted that the girls in particular "made simple idiots of themselves about him"; and then she went on to describe how one girl did so:

> "In the days when Byron was manager of Drury Lane Theatre I bethought myself that I would go on to the stage. Our means were very narrow, and it was necessary for me to do something, and this seemed to suit me better than anything else; in any case it was the only form of occupation congenial to my girlish love of glitter and excitement.... I called, then, on Byron in his capacity of manager, and he promised to do what he could to help me as regards the stage. The result you know. I am too old now to play with any mock repentance. I was young, and vain, and poor. He was famous beyond all precedent.... His beauty was as haunting as his fame, and he was all-powerful in the direction in which my ambition turned. It seems to me almost needless to say that the attentions of a man like this, with all London at his feet, very quickly completely turned the head of a girl in my position; and when you recollect that I was brought up to consider marriage not only as a useless but as an absolutely sinful custom, that only bigotry made necessary, you will scarcely wonder at the results, which you know."

That is the story as Miss Clairmont remembered it, or as she wished posterity to believe it. She also seems to have been fully persuaded in her own mind that Shelley had recommended her to apply to Byron, and

that it was about her that Byron and Lady Byron fell out; but the letters published by Mr. Murray show all this to be a tissue of absurd inexactitudes. What actually happened was that Miss Clairmont wrote to Byron under the pseudonym of "E Trefusis," beginning "An utter stranger takes the liberty of addressing you," and proceeding to say: "It may seem a strange assertion, but it is not the less true that I place my happiness in your hands."

There is no reference there, it will be remarked, to any desire on Miss Clairmont's part to adopt the theatrical profession. The few references to such a desire which do occur later in the correspondence are of such a nature as to show that Miss Clairmont did not entertain it seriously, consisting mainly of objections to Byron's proposal that she should discuss the matter with Mr. Kinnaird instead of him. Miss Clairmont, in short, made it abundantly clear that she was in love, not with the theatre, but with Byron; and the more evasive Byron showed himself, the more ardently and impulsively did she advance. We gather from her letters, indeed, that most of those letters were left unanswered, that Byron very frequently was "not at home" to her, and that, when she was at last admitted, she did not find him alone.

Most women would have been discouraged by such a series of repulses; but Miss Clairmont was not. In response to a communication in which Byron had begged her to "write short," she wrote: "I do not expect you to love me; I am not worthy of your love." But she begged him, if he could not love, at least to let himself be loved—to suffer her to demonstrate that she, on her part, could "love gently and with affection"; and thus she paved the way to a practical proposal:

> "Have you, then," (she asked) "any objection to the following plan? On Thursday Evening we may go out of town together by some stage of mail about the distance of ten or twelve miles. There we shall be free and unknown; we can return early the following morning. I have arranged everything here so that the slightest suspicion may not be excited. Pray do so with your people."

Even to that appeal Byron seems to have turned a deaf ear. One infers as much from the fact that other appeals followed it: "Do not delay our meeting after Saturday—I cannot endure the suspense," &c. After that, however, and apparently quite soon after it, followed the capitulation; and for the sequel we will turn again to Mr. Graham's report of Miss Clairmont's confessions:

> "He was making his final arrangements for leaving England, when I told him of the project the Shelleys and I had formed of the journey to Geneva. He at once suggested that we should all meet at Geneva, and delightedly fell in with my proposal to accompany me one day when I had arranged to visit the Shelleys at Marlow,[10] where they were then stopping, and arrange matters. We started early one morning, and we arrived at Marlow about the mid-day dinner-hour.... Byron refreshed himself with a huge mug of beer.... A few minutes afterwards in came Shelley and Mary. It was such a merry party that we made at lunch in the inn parlour: Byron, despite his misfortunes, was in the spirits of a boy at leaving England, and Shelley was overjoyed

> at meeting his idolised poet, who had actually come all the way from London to see him."

Such are the facts, so far as they are ascertainable, concerning the origin of this curious *liaison*. It is a story which begins, and goes on for some time, though it does not conclude, like the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife; and Miss Clairmont recalls how exultantly she proclaimed her triumph. "Percy! Mary! What do you think? The great Lord Byron loves me!" she exclaimed, bursting in upon her friends; and she adds that Shelley regarded the attachment as right and natural and proper, and a proof that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

He may have done so, for he was a dreamer, cradled in illusions, unfettered by codes, always ready to look upon life as a fairy-tale that was turning out to be true. Whether he did so or not, it seems at any rate pretty clear that he was in Miss Clairmont's confidence, knew for what reason Byron wished to meet him at Geneva, and acquiesced in the proposal. But it is equally certain that he was not in Byron's confidence, and had no suspicion of the spirit in which Byron had entered into the intrigue.

For Byron was not in love with Miss Clairmont, and never had been in love with her, and never would be. In so far as he loved at all, he still loved Mary Chaworth, to whom his heart always returned at every crisis of unhappiness. There was no question of any renewal of the old passionate relations; but she consented to see him once more before he left England. "When we two parted in silence and tears" seems to belong to this moment of his life—the

moment at which Miss Clairmont first persuaded herself, and then persuaded Shelley, that she was enthroned for ever in the author's heart. That, still, was his one real sentimental hold on life. Nothing else mattered; and the coquetries and audacities of this child of seventeen mattered less than most things.

But a man must live; a man must divert himself. Most especially must a man do so when, as Byron expressed it, his household gods lay shivered around him—when his home was broken up and his child was taken away—when rumours as intangible as abominable were afloat to his dishonour—when the society of which he had been the bright particular star was turning its back on him. Even the love, or what passed for such, of a stage-struck girl of seventeen, could be welcome in such a case, and it would not be difficult to give something which could pass for love in return for it.

That was what happened—and that was all that happened. Miss Clairmont told Mr. Graham, in so many words, that she never loved Byron, but was only "dazzled" by him. It is written in Byron's letters —from which there shall be quotations in due course —and it is amply demonstrated by his conduct, that he never loved Miss Clairmont, but only accepted favours which she pressed upon him, and suffered her to help him to live at a time when life was difficult.

The credit of having done that for him, however, should be freely given to her. The appointment which she made with him at Geneva touched his flight from England with romance. His reception by the generality of English residents on the Continent

was very, very doubtful. It would have been painful to him to travel across Europe, defying opinion in solitude; but he and Shelley and Mary Godwin and Jane Clairmont could defy it in company and laugh; and it was with this confident assurance in his mind that, as Hobhouse writes, "the dear fellow pulled off his cap and waved it" when the Ostend packet glided out of Dover harbour.

CHAPTER XXIII

LIFE AT GENEVA—THE AFFAIR WITH JANE CLAIRMONT

"From Brussels," as Moore magniloquently puts it, "the noble traveller pursued his course along the Rhine." At Geneva he joined Shelley and his party who had taken the shorter route across France; and it would seem that he felt the need of all the moral support which their companionship could give him.

Concerning the nature of his reception in Switzerland, indeed, there is a good deal of conflicting testimony; but the balance of the evidence points to its having been unfavourable. His own statement is that he "retired entirely from society," with the exception of "some occasional intercourse with Coppet at the wish of Madame de

Staël"; but there are indications that the retirement was not voluntary, and that, even at Coppet, his welcome was something less than enthusiastic. On the former point we may quote the letters of Lady Westmorland, just published by Lady Rose Weigall:

> "Lord Byron has been very coldly received here both by the natives and by the English. No one visited him, though there is much curiosity about him. He has been twice to Coppet."

Only twice, be it observed; and on one of the two occasions, one of Madame de Staël's guests, Mrs. Hervey the novelist—a mature woman novelist of sixty-five virtuous summers—fainted, according to one account, and "nearly fainted," according to another, at the sudden appearance of the Man of Sin, though, when she came to, she was ashamed of herself, and conversed with him. Probably he called again; and not all the Coppet house-party shared Mrs. Hervey's consternation at his visits. Lady Westmorland did not for one, but commented on his "sweetness and sadness, melancholy and depression," adding: "If he was all that he tries to seem now he would really be very fascinating." On the other hand, however, Madame de Staël's son-in-law, the Duc de Broglie, summed him up unkindly and almost scornfully, declaring him "a boastful pretender in the matter of vice," protesting that "his talk was heavy and tiresome," and that "he did not manœuvre his lame legs with the same ease and nonchalance as M. de Talleyrand," and concluding:

> "Madame de Staël, who helped all her friends to make the best of themselves, did what she could to make him cut a dignified

> figure without success; and when the first moment of curiosity had passed, his society ceased to attract, and no one was glad to see him."

Which clearly indicates, in spite of the offensive priggishness of the witness, that the tide of hostile opinion was, indeed, flowing too strongly for even Madame de Staël to stem it.

She did her best, however; for she was no prude, but a woman with a great heart, who had herself sought happiness in marriage, and failed to find it there, and had openly done things for which, if she had been an Englishwoman, Mrs. Grundy, instead of lionising, would have turned and rent her. She went further, and proposed to write to Lady Byron and try to arrange terms of peace; and Byron thanked her, and let her do so.

Not, of course, that he had the least desire to return to Lady Byron's society. He was presently to thunder at her as his "moral Clytemnestra"; and Cordy Jeaffreson's suggestion that his irrepressible rhetoric was "only the superficial ferment covering the depths of his affection for her," and that "the woman at whom he railed so insanely was the woman who shared with his child the last tender emotions of his unruly heart" is as absurd a suggestion as ever a biographer put forth. Hobhouse has told us that Byron never was in love with Lady Byron; and, after what we have seen of Lady Byron's conduct and correspondence, it is hard to believe that any man would have been in love with her after living with her for a twelvemonth. Moreover, we know from "The Dream" where Byron's heart was at this time, as always, and we know from his own, as well as from

Miss Clairmont's confessions, with how little regard for Lady Byron's feelings he was just then diverting himself in the Genevan suburbs; and we may fairly conclude that what he desired was not to return to her, but merely to be set right with the world by a nominal reconciliation, which would still leave him free to live apart from her.

He did not get what he wanted, and Lady Byron was quite within her rights in withholding it. He had allowed himself to be manœuvred into a false position, and had no claim upon her to help him to manœuvre himself out of it; while she, on her part, was much too high principled to strain a point in favour of a returning prodigal—especially if, as is probable, information had reached her as to his proceedings in his exile. So she rejected his overtures in that cold, judicial, high-minded way of hers; and Byron did not repeat them, but made it clear that he had meant nothing by them, seeing that—

His reason is in "The Dream" which he wrote in July 1816. It was another of his bursts of candour, telling the world (and Lady Byron) yet again how he loved Mary Chaworth, and always had loved her, and always would, and how, even on his wedding day, the memory of her had come between him and his bride:

> "*A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.*
> *The Wanderer was returned—I saw him stand*
> *Before an Altar—with a gentle bride;*
> *Her face was fair, but was not that which made*
> *The Starlight of his boyhood:—as he stood*
> *Even at the altar, o'er his brow there came*
> *The self-same aspect, and the quivering shock*
> *That in the antique Oratory shook*

His bosom in its solitude: and then—
As in that hour—a moment o'er his face
The tablet of unutterable thoughts
Was traced,—and then it faded as it came,
And he stood calm and quiet, and he spoke
The fitting vows, but heard not his own words,
And all things reeled around him; he could see
Not that which was, nor that which should have been—
But the old mansion and the accustomed hall,
And the remembered chambers, and the place,
The day, the hour, the sunshine, and the shade,
All things pertaining to that place and hour
And her who was his destiny, came back
And thrust themselves between him and the light."

That was his Parthian shaft; and Cordy Jeaffreson's view of "The Dream" as "a lovely and elaborate falsehood, written to persuade all mankind that he never loved the woman whose heart he was yearning to recover" is much too preposterous to be admitted. Mary Chaworth's husband knew that it was no figment. He recognised the reference to a certain "peculiar diadem of trees" on his estate, and gave orders that those trees should be cut down. Lady Byron had no such remedy open to her; but she knew what was meant and wrapped herself up in her virtue; while Byron, on his part, turned to the diversions which were to help him to live in the face of the world's contumely.

Alike for him and for Shelley and the two ladies who attended him there was a good deal of that contumely as long as they remained in the Hotel d'Angleterre; and it may almost be said that they invited it by making themselves conspicuous. In

Shelley's relations with Miss Godwin and Miss Clairmont there was at least the appearance of promiscuity—an appearance on which it did not take gossip long to base positive asseveration.[11] Byron, already an object of curiosity on account of his supposed misdeeds, had made himself conspicuous by his coach, and his retinue, and his manner of travelling *en seigneur*. So that the other boarders stared when he arrived, and stared still more when they saw him fraternising with his brother poet and the ladies, not only wondering what the eccentric party would be up to next, but keeping close watch on their comings and goings, following them to the lake-side when they went out boating, awaiting them on the lake-side when they landed on their return, lining up to inspect them as often as carriages were brought to the door to take them for a drive.

They did not like it, and moved into villas on the other side of the Rhone, only to discover that the Hotel d'Angleterre overlooked them, and that its obliging landlord had set up a large telescope so that his visitors might survey their proceedings the more commodiously. This obliged them to move again—Byron to the Villa Diodati, and Shelley to the Maison Chapuis or Campagne Mont Allègre—and there at last they were able, as the party of the Libertins in the Geneva of the Reformation put it, to "live as they chose without reference to the preachers."

To much that they did there the preachers, even those of Calvin's time, could have taken no exception. They talked—the sort of talk that would have been high over the heads of their censors of the d'Angleterre; they rowed on the lake, and sang in their boat in the moonlight; they read poetry, and wrote it. Shelley pressed Byron to read Wordsworth;

and he did so, with results which are apparent in the Third Canto of "Childe Harold," where we find the Wordsworthian conception of the unity of man with Nature reproduced and spoiled, as Wordsworth most emphatically insisted, in the reproduction. There was a week of rain during which the friends decided to fleet the time by writing ghost stories, and Mary Godwin wrote "Frankenstein." There was also a circular tour of the lake, undertaken without the ladies, in the course of which Shelley had a narrow escape from drowning near Saint Gingolph. These things were a part, and not the least important part, of the diversions which helped Byron to defy the slanderers whom he could not answer. So was his short trip to the Oberland with Hobhouse. And, finally, meaning so little to him that one naturally keeps it to the end and adds it as a detail, there was the "affair" with Miss Jane Clairmont.

On this branch of the subject he wrote to Mrs. Leigh, who had heard exaggerated rumours:

> "As to all these 'mistresses,' Lord help me—I have had but one. Now don't scold; but what could I do?—a foolish girl, in spite of all I could say or do, would come after me, or rather went before—for I found her here—and I have had all the plague possible to persuade her to go back again; but at last she went. Now, dearest, I do most truly tell thee that I could not help this, that I did all I could to prevent it, and have at last put an end to it. I was not in love, nor have any love left for any; but I could not exactly play the Stoic with a woman who had scrambled eight hundred miles to unphilosophise me. Besides, I had been regaled of late with so

> many ‘two courses and a *desert*’ (Alas!) of aversion, that I was fain to take a little love (if pressed particularly) by way of novelty.”

The love had been pressed, as we have seen, and as Miss Clairmont, in her age, admitted, very particularly indeed. She had dreamt, she admits—and she would have us think that Shelley and Mary Godwin expected—that her alliance with “the great Lord Byron” was to be permanent; and this though she declares, elsewhere in her confessions, that she did not really love him, but was only dazzled by him, and that her heart, in truth, was Shelley’s.

It was an ambitious dream; and it would be easy to make a list of reasons why it was impossible that it should come true. The mood in which she found Byron was only one of them. The defects and limitations of her own qualities furnish others. She was a tradesman’s daughter, and, though well-educated, not without vulgarity; pretentious, but superficial; stage-struck, a romp, and a mimic. If she ever mimicked Byron—if, in particular, she ever mimicked his lameness—a good deal would be explained.

One does not know whether she did or not. What one does know is that he shook her off rather roughly, and, never having loved her, presently conceived a dislike for her; and that though she bore him a child—the little Allegra, so named after her birthplace, who only lived to be five years of age, and now lies buried at Harrow. To Allegra, indeed, Byron was good and kind—he looked forward, he told Moore and others, to the time when she would be a support to the loneliness of his old age; but to Allegra’s mother he would have nothing more to say. How she

hunted him down, and how she and the Countess Guiccioli made each other jealous—these are matters into which it is unnecessary to enter here. The conclusions which Miss Clairmont drew, as she told Mr. Graham, was that Byron's attitude towards women was that of a Sultan towards the ladies of his harem. No doubt it was so in her case—and through her fault; for her plight was very much like that of the worshipper of Juggernaut who should prostrate himself before the oncoming car and then complain because the wheels pass over him.

Probably, if she had been less pressing, or less clinging, he would have been more grateful; for there assuredly was cause for gratitude even though there was no room for love. Vulgar, feather-headed, stage-struck little thing that she was, Jane Clairmont, by throwing herself at Byron's head, and telling him, without waiting to be asked, that she, at least, would count the world well lost for him—and still more perhaps by bringing him into relation with the Shelleys—had rendered him real help in the second desperate crisis of his life. One may repeat, indeed, that she helped him to live through that dark period; and if she knew that, or guessed it, she may well have felt aggrieved that his return for her passion was so inadequate.

But he could not help it. His heart was out of his keeping, and he could not give what he did not possess. A "passade" was all that he was capable of just then; but that this "passade" did really help him to feel his feet again in stormy waters, and bring him back once more to cheerfulness and self-respect, is amply proved, first by the change of tone which appears in his more intimate writings, and then by the new, and worse, way of life into which we see

him falling after the curtain has been rung down on the episode.

Shelley departed, taking Miss Clairmont and her sister with him, sorely, as there is reason to believe, against the former's wish, towards the end of August; the honeymoon, such as it was, having lasted about three months. Towards the end of the time, visitors began to arrive—"Monk" Lewis, and "Conversation" Sharp, and Scrope Davies, and Hobhouse—but most particularly Hobhouse who wrote Mrs. Leigh a reassuring letter to the effect that her brother was "living with the strictest attention to decorum, and free from all offence, either to God or man or woman," having given up brandy and late hours and "quarts of magnesia" and "deluges of soda-water," and appearing to be "as happy as it is consistent for a man of honour and common feeling to be after the occurrence of a calamity involving a charge, whether just or unjust, against his honour and his feeling."

That was written on September 9; and it approximated to the truth. Having despatched his report, Hobhouse took Byron for the tour already referred to—over the Col de Jaman, down the Simmenthal to Thun, up the Lake of Thun to Interlaken, and thence to Lauterbrunnen, Grindelwald, Brienz, and back by way of Berne, Fribourg, and Yverdon. Byron kept a journal of the journey for his sister to peruse. In the main it is merely a record, admirably written, of things seen; but now and again the diarist speaks out and shows how exactly his companion had read and interpreted his mind.

"It would be a great injustice," Hobhouse had continued to Mrs. Leigh, in reference to the

"calamity" and the "charge," "to suppose that he has dismissed the subject from his thoughts, or indeed from his conversation, upon any other motive than that which the most bitter of his enemies would commend. The uniformly guarded and tranquil manner shows the effort which it is meant to hide." And there are just two passages in the Diary in which we see the tranquil manner breaking down. In the first place at Grindelwald:

> "Starlight, beautiful, but a devil of a path. Never mind, got safe in; a little lightning; but the whole of the day as fine in point of weather as the day on which Paradise was made. Passed *whole woods of withered pines, all withered*; trunks stripped and barkless, branches lifeless; done by a single winter—their appearance reminded me of me and my family."

In the second place, at the very end of the tour:

> "I ... have seen some of the noblest views in the world. But in all this—the recollections of bitterness, and more especially of recent and more home desolation, which must accompany me through life, have preyed upon me here; and neither the music of the Shepherd, the crashing of the Avalanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the Glacier, the Forest, nor the Cloud, have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart, nor enabled me to lose my old wretched identity in the majesty, and the power and the glory, around, above, and beneath me."

A striking admission truly of the unreality and insincerity of the Byronic presentation of

Wordsworth's Pantheism, and concluding with an exclamation which shows clearly how distinct a thing Byron's individuality was to him, and how far he was from picturing himself, in sober prose, as "a portion of the tempest" or anything but his passionate and suffering self:

> "I am past reproaches; and there is a time for all things. I am past the wish of vengeance, and I know of none like for what I have suffered; but the hour will come when what I feel must be felt, and the—but enough."

And so up the Rhone valley and over the Simplon to Italy, where his life was to enter upon yet another phase.

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM GENEVA TO VENICE—THE AFFAIR WITH THE DRAPER'S WIFE

As long as Hobhouse remained with Byron nothing memorable happened. There was a good deal of the schoolmaster about Hobhouse, though he could sometimes unbend in a non-committal way; and in the presence of schoolmasters life is seldom a drama and never an extravaganza. The change, therefore, in

the manner of Byron's life did not occur until, tiring of his friend's supervision, he declined to accompany him to Rome. In the meantime, first at Milan and then at Verona, he held up his head, and passed like a pageant through the salons of the best continental society.

Milan, he told Murray, was "very polite and hospitable." He parted there from Polidori, who was expelled from the territory on account of a brawl with an Austrian officer in a theatre; and he dined with the Marquis de Brême—an Italian nobleman equally famous for his endeavours to popularise vaccination and suppress mendicity—to meet Monti the Italian poet and Stendhal the French novelist. "Never," wrote Stendhal of that meeting, "shall I forget the sublime expression of his countenance; it was the peaceful look of power united with genius." And a long account of Byron's sojourn at Milan was contributed by Stendhal to the *Foreign Literary Gazette*.

The introductions, Stendhal says, "passed with as much ceremonious gravity as if our introducer had been de Brême's grandfather in days of yore ambassador from the Duke of Savoy to the court of Louis XIV." He describes Byron as "a dandy" who "expressed a constant dread of augmenting the bulk of his outward man, concealed his right foot as much as possible, and endeavoured to render himself agreeable in female society;" and he proceeds to relate how female society sought to make itself agreeable to him:

> "His fine eyes, his handsome horses, and his fame gained him the smiles of several young, lovely, and noble females, one of whom, in

> particular, performed a journey of more than a hundred miles for the pleasure of being present at a masked ball to which his Lordship was invited. Byron was apprised of the circumstance, but either from *hauteur* or shyness, declined an introduction. 'Your poets are perfect clowns,' cried the fair one, as she indignantly quitted the ball-room."

And then again:

> "Perhaps few cities could boast such an assemblage of lovely women as that which chance had collected at Milan in 1817. Many of them had flattered themselves with the idea that Byron would seek an introduction; but whether from pride, timidity, or a remnant of dandyism, which induced him to do exactly the contrary of what was expected, he invariably declined the honour. He seemed to prefer a conversation on poetical or philosophical subjects."

The explanation of his aloofness, Stendhal thought, might be that he "had some guilty stain upon his conscience, similar to that which wrecked Othello's fame." He suspected him of having, in a frenzy of jealousy, "shortened the days of some fair Grecian slave, faithless to her vows of love." That, it seemed to him, might account for the fact that he so often "appeared to us like one labouring under an access of folly, often approaching to madness." But, of course, as this narrative has demonstrated, Stendhal was guessing wildly and guessing wrong; and the thoughts which really troubled Byron were thoughts of the wreck of his household gods, and the failure of his sentimental life, and perhaps also of the failure of

Miss Clairmont's free offering of a naïve and passionate heart to awaken any answering emotion in his breast, or do more than tide him over the first critical weeks following upon the separation. So he wrote Moore a long letter from Verona, relating his kind reception by the Milanese, discoursing of Milanese manners and morals, but then concluding:

> "If I do not speak to you of my own affairs, it is not from want of confidence, but to spare you and myself. My day is over—what then —I have had it. To be sure, I have shortened it."

From Verona, too, he wrote on the same day to his sister, saying, after compliments and small-talk: "I am also growing *grey* and *giddy*, and cannot help thinking my head will decay; I wish my memory would, at least my remembrance." All of which seems to show Byron defiant, but not yet reckless, preferring, if not actually enjoying, the society of his equals, and still paying a very proper regard to appearances. The change occurred when he got to Venice and Hobhouse left him there. Then there was a moral collapse, just as if a moral support had been withdrawn—a collapse of which the first outward sign was a new kind of intrigue.

Hitherto his amours had been with his social equals; and the daughters of the people had, since his celebrity, had very little attraction for him. Now the decline begins—a decline which was to conduct him to very degraded depths; and our first intimation of it is in a letter written to Moore within a week of his arrival. He begins with a comment on the decay of Venice—"I have been familiar with ruins too long to dislike desolation"—and he proceeds:

> "Besides, I have fallen in love, which next to falling into the canal (which would be of no use as I can swim), is the best or the worst thing I could do. I have got some extremely good apartments in the house of a 'Merchant of Venice,' who is a good deal occupied with business, and has a wife in her twenty-second year. Marianna (that is her name) is in her appearance altogether like an antelope.... Her features are regular and rather aquiline—mouth small—skin clear and soft, with a kind of hectic colour—forehead remarkably good: her hair is of the dark gloss, curl, and colour of Lady Jersey's: her figure is light and pretty, and she is a famous songstress."

And so on at some length. Our only other witness to Marianna's charms and character—a manuscript note to Moore's Life quoted in Murray's edition of the Letters—describes her as "a demon of avarice and libidinousness who intrigued with every resident in the house and every guest who visited it." It is possible—it is even probable—that this description, made from a different point of view than Byron's, fits her. Byron's enthusiasm was for her physical, not her moral, attributes; and it does not appear that he was under any illusion as to the latter. The former, however, fascinated him; and we find him dwelling on them, in letter after letter, to Murray as well as Moore—the publisher, indeed, being the first recipient of the confidence that "Our little arrangement is completed; the usual oaths having been taken, and everything fulfilled according to the 'understood relations' of such liaisons." Which means, very clearly, that the draper's wife has become the poet's mistress, with the knowledge of

her husband, and to his pecuniary advantage.

The story is not one on which to dwell. It is less a story, indeed, than a string of unrelated incidents. Though spun out and protracted, it does not end but leaves off; and of the circumstances of its termination there is no record. Marianna's avarice may have had something to do with it. So may her habit, above referred to, of intriguing with all comers. But nothing is known; and the one thing certain is that, though Byron was attracted, sentiment played no part in the attraction. It would seem too that he was only relatively faithful.

One gathers that from the account which he gives to Moore of a visit received from Marianna's sister-in-law, whom Marianna caught in his apartment, and seized by the hair, and slapped:

> "I need not describe the screaming which ensued. The luckless visitor took flight. I seized Marianna, who, after several vain attempts to get away in pursuit of the enemy, fairly went into fits in my arms; and, in spite of reasoning, eau de Cologne, vinegar, half a pint of water, and God knows what other waters beside, continued so till past midnight."

Whereupon enter Signor Segati himself, "her lord and master, and finds me with his wife fainting upon the sofa, and all the apparatus of confusion, dishevelled hair, hats, handkerchiefs, salts, smelling-bottles—and the lady as pale as ashes, without sense or motion." And then, explanations more or less suitable having been offered and accepted, "The sister-in-law, very much discomposed at being treated in such wise, has (not having her own shame

before her eyes) told the affair to half Venice, and the servants (who were summoned by the fight and the fainting) to the other half."

And so forth, and so forth. It is all very vulgar, and none of it of the faintest importance except for the sake of the light which it throws on Byron's mind and disposition, though its importance is, from that point of view, considerable. It shows Byron sick of sentiment because sentiment has failed him and played him false, but grasping at the sensual pleasures of love as the solid realities about which no mistake is possible. It shows him, moreover, socially as well as sentimentally, on the down grade, consorting with inferiors, and in some danger of unfitting himself for the company of his equals.

The reckless note of the man resolved to enjoy himself, or at any rate to keep up the pretence that he is doing so, although his heart is bankrupt, is struck in one of the letters to Augusta. It refers to a previous letter, not published, in which the tidings of the "new attachment" has already been communicated, and to a letter addressed, some time previously, to Lady Byron; and it continues:

> "I was wretched enough when I wrote it, and had been so for many a long day and month: at present I am less so, for reasons explained in my late letter; and as I never pretend to be what I am not, you may tell her, if you please, that I am recovering, and the reason also if you like it."

Which is to say that he wishes Lady Byron to be told, *totidem verbis*, and on authority which she cannot question, that, having lived connubially with both, he very much prefers the draper's wife to her. And

so, no doubt, he did; for though the draper's wife, as well as Lady Byron, had her faults, they were the faults of a naughty child rather than a pedantic schoolmistress, and therefore less exasperating to a man in the mood to which Byron had been driven. She might be—indeed she was—very jealous and very violent; but at least she did not assume airs of moral superiority and deliver lectures, or parade the heartlessness of one who is determined to be always in the right.

So that Byron delighted to have her about him. "I am very well off with Marianna, who is not at all a person to tire me," he told Murray in one letter; and in another he wrote: "She is very pretty and pleasing, and talks Venetian, which amuses me, and is naïve, and I can besides see her, and make love with her at all or any hours, which is convenient to my temperament." Just that, and nothing more than that; for such occasional outbursts of sentiment and yearnings after higher things as we do find in the letters of this date leave Signora Segati altogether on one side.

There is something of sentiment, for instance, in a letter to Mrs. Leigh informing her that Miss Clairmont has borne Byron a daughter. The mother, he says, is in England, and he prays God to keep her there; but then he thinks of the child, and continues:

> "They tell me it is very pretty, with blue eyes and *dark* hair; and, although I never was attached nor pretended attachment to the mother, still in case of the eternal war and alienation which I foresee about my legitimate daughter, Ada, it may be as well to have something to repose a hope upon. I

> must love something in my old age, and probably circumstances will render this poor little creature a great, and, perhaps, my only comfort."

There is sentiment there; and there also is sentiment, although of a different kind, in a letter written at about the same date to Moore:

> "If I live ten years longer you will see, however, that it is not over with me—I don't mean in literature, for that is nothing; and it may seem odd enough to say, I do not think it my vocation. But you will see that I shall do something or other—the times and fortune permitting—that, 'like the cosmogony, or creation of the world, will puzzle the philosophers of all ages.' But I doubt whether my constitution will hold out. I have exorcised it most devilishly."

This is a strikingly interesting, because an unconsciously prophetic, passage. Byron's ultimate efforts to "do something"—something quite unconnected with literature—is the most famous, and some would say the most glorious, incident in his life. We shall come to it very soon, and we shall see how his constitution, so sorely tried by an indiscreet diet and excessive indulgence in all things from love to Epsom Salts, just allowed him to begin his task, but did not suffer him to finish it. Enough to note here that Byron saw the better even when he preferred the worse, and never lost faith in himself even in his most degraded years, but always looked forward, even then, to the day when he would shake off sloth and sensuality in order to be worthy of his higher self.

He divined that the power to do that would be restored to him in the end—that social outlawry, though it might daze him, could not crush him—that it would come to be, in the end, a kind of education, and a source of self-reliance. But not yet, and not for a good many years to come. Before the moral recovery could begin, the moral collapse had to be completed; and the affair with the draper's wife was only the first milestone on the downward path. We shall have to follow him past other milestones before we see him turning back.

CHAPTER XXV

AT VENICE—THE AFFAIR WITH THE BAKER'S WIFE—DISSOLUTE PROCEEDINGS IN THE MOCENIGO PALACE—ILLNESS, RECOVERY AND REFORMATION

For six weeks or so in May and June 1817 Byron tore himself away from Marianna and visited Rome, where he dined with Lord Lansdowne, sat to Thorwaldsen for his bust, and gathered the materials for the Fourth Canto of "Childe Harold." He refused, however, for Marianna's sake, to go on with Hobhouse to Naples, but hurried back to her, bidding

her meet him half-way, and afterwards taking her, but not her husband, to a villa at La Mira, on the Brenta, a few miles out of Venice. It seems that the neighbours, less particular than the leaders of English society, yet including a marquis as well as a physician with four unmarried daughters, hastened to call, if not on the lady, at all events on him. Monk Lewis paid him a short visit, and Hobhouse, on his return from Naples, stayed for some time in a house close by, studying in the Ducal Library, and amassing the erudition which appears in his notes to "Childe Harold." Praise of Marianna, however, disappears from Byron's letters at this period; and one may infer from his comment on the news of the death of Madame de Staël that, if Marianna had ever made him happy, she had now ceased to do so.

> "With regard to death," he then wrote to Murray, "I doubt that we have any right to pity the dead for their own sakes."

This is not the note of a man who has found happiness in love or even pleasure in dissipation. Apparently the novelty of the new experiences was wearing off; and Byron was becoming sick of the isolation and uneventfulness of his life. He had gone to Venice largely because there was no English society there—and yet he missed it; Hoppner, the Consul-General being almost his only English friend. He had access to Venetian society, and to some extent, mixed in it; but he did not find it interesting. He tired of the receptions alike of Signora Benzoni the worldly, and of Signora Albrizzi the "blue," at which, no doubt, he was stared at as a marvel of fascinating profligacy; and he also tired of Marianna Segati, who doubtless gave him an excuse for breaking off his relations with her; and then there

followed a further and deeper plunge.

The departure of Hobhouse seems, as usual, to have given the signal. It was about the time of his departure that Byron gave up his lodging in the draper's shop and moved into the Mocenigo Palace; and the letter in which Murray is advised that Hobhouse is on his way home continues thus:

> "It is the height of the Carnival, and I am in the *estrum* and agonies of a new intrigue with I don't exactly know whom or what, except that she is insatiate of love, and won't take money, and has light hair and blue eyes, which are not common here, and that I met her at the Masque, and that when her mask is off, I am as wise as ever. I shall make what I can of the remainder of my youth."

A vow which he kept after a fashion as innumerable passages from innumerable letters prove—Moore, Murray, and James Wedderburn Webster receiving his confidences in turn. Venice, he assures the last named, "is by no means the most regular and correct moral city in the universe;" and he continues, describing the life there—not everybody's life, of course, but the life with which he has chosen to associate himself:

> "Young and old—pretty and ugly—high and low—are employed in the laudable practice of Love-making—and though most Beauty is found amongst the middling and lower classes—this of course only renders their amatory habits more universally diffused."

Then to Moore there is talk of "a Venetian girl with large black eyes, a face like Faustina's and the figure

of a Juno—tall and energetic as a Pythoness, with eyes flashing, and her dark eyes streaming in the moonlight;" while to Murray there is a long account of the affair with Margarita Cogni, the baker's wife, with whom the draper's wife disputed publicly for Byron's favours:

> "Margarita threw back her veil, and replied in very explicit Venetian: '*You* are *not* his *wife*: *I* am *not* his *wife*: *you* are his *Donna* and *I* am his *Donna*; *your* husband is a cuckold, and *mine* is another. For the rest what right have you to reproach me? if he prefers what is mine to what is yours, is it my fault? if you wish to secure him, tie him to your petticoat-string; but do not think to speak to me without a reply because you happen to be richer than I am.' Having delivered this pretty piece of eloquence (which I relate as it was translated to me by a bye-stander), she went on her way, leaving a numerous audience with Madame Segati, to ponder at her leisure on the dialogue between them."

And Byron goes on to tell other stories of Margarita's jealousy, relating that "she had inordinate self-love, and was not tolerant of other women ... so that, I being at the time somewhat promiscuous, there was great confusion and demolition of head-dresses and handkerchiefs; and sometimes my servants, in 'redding' the fray between her and other feminine persons, received more knocks than acknowledgments for their peaceful endeavours." And then follows the story of Margarita's flight from her husband's house to Byron's palace, and her husband's application to the police to restore her to him, and her second desertion of "that consumptive

cuckold," as she styled him in open court, and her final success in settling herself as a fixture in Byron's establishment, without his formal consent, but with his indolent acquiescence.

She became his housekeeper, with the result that "the expenses were reduced to less than half, and everybody did their duty better." But she also had an ungovernable temper, suppressed all letters in a feminine handwriting, threatened violence with a table-knife, and had to be disarmed by Fletcher; so that Byron at last tired of her and told her to go. She then went quietly downstairs and threw herself into the canal, but was fished out, brought to with restoratives, and sent away a second time. "And this," Byron concludes, "is the story of Margarita Cogni, as far as it belongs to me."

Like the story of Marianna Segati, it is hardly a story at all; and there seem to have been several other stories very much like it running concurrently with it. So, at all events, Byron told Augusta, who passed the news on to Hodgson, saying that her brother had written "on the old subject very uncomfortably, and on his present pursuits which are what one would dread and expect; a string of low attachments." And if a picture of the life, drawn by an eye-witness, be desired, one has only to turn to Shelley's letter on the subject to Thomas Love Peacock.

The subject of Shelley's comments is the point of view and "tone of mind" of certain passages in "Childe Harold." He finds here "a kind of obstinate and self-willed folly," and he continues:

> "Nothing can be less sublime than the true source of these expressions of contempt and desperation. The fact is that, first, the Italian

> women with whom he associates are, perhaps, the most contemptible of all who exist under the moon—the most ignorant, the most disgusting, the most bigoted; Countesses smell so strongly of garlic that an ordinary Englishman cannot approach them. Well, L. B. is familiar with the lowest sort of these women, the people his gondolieri pick up in the streets. He associates with wretches who seem almost to have lost the gait and physiognomy of man, and who do not scruple to avow practices, which are not only not named, but I believe, seldom even conceived in England. He says he disapproves, but he endures. He is heartily and deeply discontented with himself; and contemplating in the distorted mirror of his own thoughts the nature and habits of man, what can he behold but objects of contempt and despair?... And he has a certain degree of candour while you talk to him, but, unfortunately, it does not outlast your departure. No, I do not doubt, and for his sake I ought to hope, that his present career must end soon in some violent circumstance."

This, it is to be remarked, is the picture, not of an enemy, but of a friend—one who already admired Byron as the greatest poet of his generation, and was to learn to admire him as one of its greatest men: a man capable of doing great things as well as dreaming them. Evidently, therefore, it is, as far as it goes, a true picture, though there is something to be added to it—something which blackens, and also something which brightens it.

Byron, to begin with, was, during this dark period, as careless of his appearance as of his morals. It was not necessary to his facile conquests among the Venetian courtesans that he should be either sober or well-groomed. It may even, on the contrary, have been necessary that he should drink too much and go unkempt in order to live comfortably on their level. At all events he did drink too much—preferring fiery spirits to the harmless Italian wines—and indulged a large appetite for miscellaneous foods, and ceased his frequentation of the barber's shop; with the result that the flesh, set free from its customary discipline, revolted and spread abroad, and Hanson, who came to Byron at Venice to settle about the sale of Newstead to Colonel Wildman, reported to Augusta that he had found him "*fat*, immensely large, and his hair long." James Wedderburn Webster, a few months later, heard of his "corpulence" as "stupendous;" and Byron, while objecting to that epithet, was constrained to admit that it was considerable.

There were limits, however, to his excesses; and if misconduct was sometimes three parts of life for him, there always remained the fourth part to be devoted to other activities and interests. Even at his most debased hours Byron never quite lost his love of literature and out-door exercise, or his genius for friendship with men of like tastes with himself, who judged him as they found him and not as his wife said that he was; so that a picture contrasting pleasantly from Shelley's may be taken from Consul-General Hoppner, whom Byron took almost daily in his gondola to ride on the Lido:

> "Nothing could be more delightful than these rides on the Lido were to me. We were from

> half to three quarters of an hour crossing the water, during which his conversation was always most amusing and interesting. Sometimes he would bring with him any new book he had received, and read to me the passages which most struck him. Often he would repeat to me whole stanzas of the poems he was engaged in writing, as he had composed them on the preceding evening; and this was the more interesting to me because I could frequently trace in them some idea which he had started in our conversation of the preceding day, or some remark the effect of which he had evidently been trying upon me. Occasionally, too, he spoke of his own affairs, making me repeat all I had heard with regard to him, and desiring that I would not spare him, but let him know the worst that was said."

The two reports must be read, of course, not as contradicting but as supplementing one another; so that a just estimate of the actual situation may not be very difficult to arrive at.

Byron, it is important to remember, though he had so many adventures, was only thirty years of age; and at thirty even a man of genius is still very young; and a very young man is always apt, given the provocation, to challenge public attention by going to the devil conspicuously and with a blare of trumpets. He may or may not like, and therefore nurse, the idea that he has tied his life up into such a knot that nothing but death—his own death or another's—can untie it; but he is quite ready, as a rule, to accept the tangle, if not to welcome it, as an excuse for a sensational plunge into the abysms of

debauchery. And this is especially so if his passions are strong, and if his private affairs have been a public pageant, watched, whether for praise or censure, by innumerable eyes.

Both those conditions were fulfilled in Byron's case. Consequently he set out to swagger to the devil—as cynical now as he had once been sentimental—convinced, or at any rate affecting to be convinced, that, in a so-called love affair, nothing mattered but the sensual satisfaction; promiscuous in his habits and careless of his health—pleased to let Lady Byron know that he found more pleasure in the society of the scum of the stews of Venice than in hers—delighted also to think that the community at large were shocked by his dissolute proceedings. We have just seen him asking his sister to inform his wife what he was doing and how he was living. His friend Harness, who had long since lost sight of him, assures us that one of his great joys was to send defamatory paragraphs about himself to the continental newspapers in the hope that the English press would copy them, and that the world would believe him to be even worse than he was. He was vicious, that is to say, and he was also, as the Duc de Broglie called him, a "fanfaron of vice."

It was a phase which he had to pass through, but no more; for such a man could not possibly go on living such a life for long. The real risk for his reputation was that he should die before the phase was finished, die in a house which was little better than a brothel, with Venetian prostitutes tearing each other's hair and scratching each other's faces by his bedside. The end, indeed, might easily have come in that ignominious fashion; for he had a recurrence of the malaria to which he had been liable ever since his

first journey to Greece, and, in view of the liberties which he had taken with his constitution, it is rather surprising that he recovered from it. Still, he did recover; and, whether ill or well, he never quite lost sight of the better possibilities.

His harem claimed his days, but not, as a rule, his nights. There came, pretty regularly, an hour when the revelry ceased and the domestic female companions were packed off to their several beds; and then pens and ink and ardent spirits were set before Byron, and he wrote. It was, indeed, just when his life was most dissolute that his genius was brightest. He wrote "Manfred," the poem in which he responded to the challenge of his calumniators, and showed that he could, if he chose, cast a halo round the very charge with which they had sought to crush him. He wrote the Fourth Canto of "Childe Harold," in which we see the last of the admired Byronic pose. He began "Don Juan," the poem in which the sincere cynic, who has come to cynicism by way of sentiment, passes with a light step from the pathetic to the ribald, and, attacking all hypocrisies, from those of Mrs. Grundy to those of the Holy Alliance, brushes them impatiently away like cobwebs.

Byron, in short, remained a fighter even in the midst of his self-indulgences; and for the fighter there is always hope. Self-indulgence brings satiety, but fighting does not, when it can be seen that the blows are telling; and there could be no question of the effect of Byron's blows. Though the sea rolled between him and his countrymen, he shocked them as they had never been shocked before. Regarding him as the wickedest of wicked men, they admitted that his was a wickedness that had to be reckoned with, which was exactly what he wished and had

intended. Perhaps he shocked them more for the fun of the thing than as the conscious champion of any particular cause; but that does not matter. The greatest builders are nearly always those who are building better than they know; and the building, at any rate, saved Byron from suffering too much harm from the loose manner of his life, and helped him to await his opportunity.

"I am only a spectator upon earth, until a tenfold opportunity offers. It may come yet," he wrote to Moore about this time. The passage is enigmatical, and may only refer to some dream of vengeance cherished against Lady Byron and her advisers. On the other hand, it may just as well be a second reference to that resolution to "do something,"—something which "like the cosmogony or creation of the world will puzzle the philosophers of all ages,"—formulated in the letter to Moore already quoted. The letter, at all events, is quickly followed by news of the illness already mentioned, and of which there is a more or less particular account in one of the letters to Murray:

> "You ask about my health: about the beginning of the year I was in a state of great exhaustion, attended by such debility of stomach that nothing remained upon it; and I was obliged to reform my 'way of life,' which was conducting me from the Yellow leaf to the Ground, with all deliberate speed. I am better in health and in morals, and very much yours ever,
>
> "B."

This change in the "way of life" meant, of course, in the first instance, the restoration of the draper's and

baker's wives to the baker and draper respectively, and the return of the professional prostitutes to the places in which they normally plied their trade. It also meant, in the second place, the courtship of the Countess Guiccioli, a branch of the subject to be dealt with in a separate chapter.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN THE VENETIAN SALONS— INTRODUCTION TO COUNTESS GUICCIOLI

Even at the time when the draper's and baker's wives were quarrelling over their claims to his attentions—even at the time when the baker's wife was routing the rest of the harem, and threatening violence with carving-knives—Byron never quite lost his foothold in the Venetian salons. There were two such salons, such as they were—that of the Countess Albrizzi, who aspired to be literary, and was styled the Venetian de Staël, and that of the Countess Benzoni, who aspired, in modern parlance, to be smart; and Byron was welcome in both of them, and could even wound the feelings of either hostess by preferring the receptions of her rival.

Both hostesses knew, of course, how he spent the

time which he did not spend with them. They saw the draper's wife in his box at the theatre; they saw the baker's wife frolicking with him at the Carnival; they heard shocking stories of the "goings on" at the Mocenigo Palace. But they considered that these matters were not their business—or at all events did not concern them very much. They knew that English milords were mad, and that men of genius were mad; and, as Byron was both of these things, they could pardon him for possessing a double dose of eccentricity. Moreover, in a country in which most wives as well as most husbands were unfaithful, the fuss made about Lady Byron's grievances, whatever they might be, appeared ridiculous. Why, they asked themselves, looking at the matter from their Italian view-point, could not Lady Byron take a lover and be happy instead of assuming the airs of a martyr, organising a persecution, and hiring lawyers to throw mud? And they noted, too, that Byron had picturesque ways of demonstrating that, though he followed depraved courses, he was, at the bottom of his heart, disgusted with them, and profoundly conscious of his capability of walking in sublimer paths.

> "An additional proof," says Moore, "that, in this short, daring career of libertinism, he was but desperately seeking relief for a wronged and mortified spirit, and
>
> > '*What to us seem'd guilt might be but woe,*'—
>
> is that, more than once, of an evening, when his house has been in the possession of such visitants, he has been known to hurry away in his gondola, and pass the greater part of

> the night upon the water, as if hating to return to his home."

Allowances, it was clear (to the ladies), must be made for a man (or at all events for a milord and a poet) who, even when passing from the arms of a draper's to a baker's wife, could thus search for, even if he could not "set up,"

> "*a mark of everlasting light*
> *Above the howling senses' ebb and flow*."

They made the allowances, therefore, showing that, even if they sometimes disapproved, they were always ready to forgive when the footman threw open the door and announced the return of the prodigal. To Countess Albrizzi, on these occasions, "his face appeared tranquil like the ocean on a fine Spring morning," while his hands "were as beautiful as if they had been works of art," and his eyes "of the azure colour of the heavens, from which they seemed to derive their origin." This, though Countess Albrizzi was nearly sixty years of age; so that one can readily imagine the impression made upon Countess Guiccioli, whose husband was sixty, but who was herself little more than seventeen.

> "I became acquainted with Lord Byron," she wrote to Moore, "in the April of 1819; he was introduced to me at Venice by the Countess Benzoni at one of that lady's parties. This introduction, which had so much influence over the lives of us both, took place contrary to our wishes, and had been permitted by us only from courtesy. For myself, more fatigued than usual that evening on account of the late hours they keep at Venice, I went with great repugnance

to this party, and purely in obedience to Count Guiccioli. Lord Byron, too, who was averse to forming new acquaintances—alleging that he had entirely renounced all attachments, and was unwilling any more to expose himself to their consequences—on being requested by the Countess Benzoni to allow himself to be presented to me, refused, and, at last, only assented from a desire to oblige her. His noble and exquisitely beautiful countenance, the tone of his voice, his manners, the thousand enchantments that surrounded him, rendered him so different and so superior a being to any whom I had hitherto seen that it was impossible he should not have left the most profound impression upon me. From that evening, during the whole of my subsequent stay at Venice, we met every day."



Countess Guiccioli.

The girl Countess's maiden name was Teresa Gamba; and she had been married to her elderly husband for his money. He was in his sixtieth year, and was worth about £12,000 a year. In his youth he had collaborated with Alfieri in the establishment of a national theatre. Now his principal interests were political—as were also those of the Gamba family—and the police had their eyes on them in consequence. His principal establishment was at Ravenna; and he was on the point of starting for

Ravenna, breaking the journey at various mansions which he possessed upon the road, on the evening on which his wife, acting "purely in obedience," to his instructions, attended the reception at which she lost her heart.

He removed her from Venice a very few days afterwards; but by that time the mischief was done, and it was not the heart only that had been lost. Byron had pressed his suit with impetuous precipitation, and Countess Guiocioli had yielded—without, as it would seem, the least idea that there could be any harm in her doing so.

Morality, as has been said, is a matter partly of geography and partly of chronology; and, in the Italy of those days, no woman got credit for fidelity unless she had a lover, as well as a husband, to be faithful to. So Madame Guiccioli punctuated her departure with fainting fits, and then wrote Byron appealing letters, begging him to follow her as soon as she had prepared the minds of her relatives to receive him.

To do so occupied her until the first days of June; and the further development of events may be best related in extracts from Byron's letters:

> "About the 20th I leave Venice, to take a journey into Romagna; but shall probably return in a month."

This to Murray, as early as May 6. On May 20, we find him still going, but not yet gone: "Next week I set out for Romagna, at least in all probability." On June 2, a letter addressed to Hoppner from Padua shows that he has started, but that, the favours he sought having been accorded to him at Venice, he is not very anxious to take a hot and dusty journey for

the purpose of following up the intrigue:

> "Now to go to Cuckold a Papal Count, who, like Candide, has already been 'the death of two men, one of whom was a priest,' in his own house is rather too much for my modesty, when there are several other places at least as good for the purpose. She says they must go to Bologna in the middle of June, and why the devil then drag me to Ravenna? However I shall determine nothing till I get to Bologna, and probably take some time to decide when I am there, so that, the Gods willing, you may probably see me again soon. The Charmer forgets that a man may be whistled anywhere *before*, but that *after*, a journey in an Italian June is a Conscription, and therefore she should have been less liberal in Venice, or less exigent at Ravenna."

That letter is the first which throws light on the vexed question whether Byron really loved Madame Guiccioli, or merely viewed her as an eligible mistress. It is to be observed, however, that his conduct was less cynical than his correspondence, and that the Countess, on her part, saw no reason for suspecting insincerity. "I shall stay but a few days at Bologna," is his announcement when he gets there; and the Countess relates his arrival:

> "Dante's tomb, the classical pine wood, the relics of antiquity which are to be found in that place, afforded a sufficient pretext for me to invite him to come, and for him to accept my invitation. He came, in fact, in the month of June ... while I, attacked by a consumptive complaint, which had its origin

> from the moment of my quitting Venice, appeared on the point of death.... His motives for such a visit became the subject of discussion, and these he himself afterwards involuntarily divulged; for having made some inquiries with a view to paying me a visit, and being told that it was unlikely he would ever see me again, he replied, if such were the case, he hoped that he should die also; which circumstance, being repeated, revealed the object of his journey."

The narrative adds that Count Guiccioli himself begged Byron to call in the hope that his society might be beneficial to his wife's health; and it is, at all events, certain that Byron's arrival was followed by a remarkably rapid recovery, explicable from the fact, set forth by Byron, that her complaint, after all, was not consumption but a "fausse couche." The husband's attitude, however, puzzled him. "If I come away with a Stiletto in my gizzard some fine afternoon," he writes, "I shall not be astonished;" and he proceeds:

> "I cannot make *him* out at all, he visits me frequently, and takes me out (like Whittington the Lord Mayor) in a coach and *six* horses.... By the aid of a Priest, a Chambermaid, a young negro-boy, and a female friend, we are enabled to carry on our unlawful loves, as far as they can well go, though generally with some peril, especially as the female friend and priest are at present out of town for some days, so that some of the precautions devolve upon the Maid and Negro."

That, it will be agreed, is rather the language of Don Juan than of a really devout lover; but there is more of the lover and less of the Don Juan in the letters which succeed. In the letter to Murray, for instance, dated June 29:

> "I see my *Dama* every day at the proper and improper hours; but I feel seriously uneasy about her health, which seems very precarious. In losing her I should lose a being who has run great risks on my account, and whom I have every reason to love, but I must not think this possible. I do not know what I *should* do if she died, but I ought to blow my brains out, and I hope that I should. Her husband is a very polite personage, but I wish he would not carry me out in his Coach and Six, like Whittington and his Cat."

And still more in a letter to Hoppner dated July 2:

> "If anything happens to my present *Amica*, I have done with passion for ever, it is my *last* love. As to libertinism, I have sickened myself of that, as was natural in the way I went on, and have at least derived that advantage from vice, to *love* in the better sense of the word. *This* will be my last adventure. I can hope no more to inspire attachment, and I trust never again to feel it."

But then, in a letter to Murray, dated August 9, there is a relapse and a change of tone:

> "My 'Mistress dear,' who hath 'fed my heart upon smiles and wine' for the last two months, set out for Bologna with her

> husband this morning, and it seems that I follow him at three to-morrow morning. I cannot tell how our romance will end, but it hath gone on hitherto most erotically—such perils and escapes—Juan's are a child's play in comparison."

Gallantry, not passion, is the note there; but, on the other hand, passion and not gallantry prevails in the letter to the Countess, written on a blank page of her copy of "Corinne," which Byron had read in her garden in her absence:

> "My destiny rests with you, and you are a woman, seventeen years of age, and two out of a convent. I wish that you had stayed there, with all my heart, or, at least, that I had never met you in your married state.
>
> "But all this is too late. I love you and you love me—at least you *say so*, and *act* as if you *did* so, which last is a great consolation in all events. But *I* more than love you, and cannot cease to love you."
>
> "Think of me, sometimes, when the Alps and the ocean divide us—but they never will unless you *wish* it."

A series of contradictions with which we must be content to be perplexed; though perhaps they indicate nothing except that Byron changed his mind from time to time, and was more in love on some days than on others. And that, of course, it may be urged, is pretty much the same as saying that he was not, in the fullest sense of the words, in love at all.

That his feelings for the Countess differed from his

feelings for the wives of the baker and the draper is, indeed, clear enough. Otherwise he would not have drawn the invidious distinction which we have seen him drawing between the “libertinism” of the earlier intrigues and the “romance” of the later one. Those passions had depended solely on the senses; into this one sentiment and intellectual sympathy entered. That is what his biographers are thinking of when they say that the new attachment either lifted him out of the mire or, at least, prevented him from slipping back into it. That, in particular, is what Shelley meant when he wrote of Byron as “greatly improved in every respect” and apparently becoming “a virtuous man,” and added, by way of explanation: “The connection with La Guiccioli has been an inestimable benefit to him.”

But that, after all merely signifies that Byron, having a lady instead of a loose woman for his mistress, had to forswear sack and live cleanly—a thing which the painful effects of his excesses on his health had already disposed him to do. It does not signify that he had found a love which filled his life, or healed his wounds, or effaced the memories of his earlier loves; and there is, in fact, a poem of the period to which Mr. Richard Edgcumbe points as circumstantial proof that, even when he was paying his suit to Madame Guiccioli, Byron’s heart was in England, with Mary Chaworth.

Three years had passed since he had seen her. Her mind had been temporarily deranged by her troubles, but she had recovered. She had been reconciled to her husband, and was living with him

at Colwick Hall, near Nottingham. Close to the walls of that old mansion flows the river Trent; and Byron wrote the lines beginning:

> "*River that rollest by the ancient walls,*
> *Where dwells the Lady of my love, when she*
> *Walks by thy brink, and there perchance recalls*
> *A faint and fleeting memory of me.*"

The common supposition is that the river invoked is the Po, and that the lady referred to is Madame Guiccioli; but that can hardly be. Seeing that Madame Guiccioli was, at this time, beseeching Byron to come to her arms at Ravenna, her recollection of him could hardly be described as "fair and fleeting." The allusion is evidently to an anterior passion; and Madame Guiccioli's place in the poem comes in a later stanza:

> "*My blood is all meridian: were it not,*
> *I had not left my clime, nor should I be,*
> *In spite of tortures, ne'er to be forgot,*
> *A slave again to Love—at least of thee.*"

And then again:

> "*A stranger loves the Lady of the land,*
> *Born far beyond the mountains, but his blood*
> *Is all meridian, as if never fanned*
> *By the bleak wind that chills the polar flood.*
>
> "*'Tis vain to struggle—let me perish young—*
> *Live as I lived, and love as I have loved:*
> *To dust if I return, from dust I sprung,*
> *And then, at least, my heart can ne'er be moved.*"

The conclusion here clearly is that Byron is

committed to passion because his temperament compels it, and is very grateful to Madame Guiccioli for loving him, but that if Mary Chaworth should ever lift a little finger and beckon him, he would leave Madame Guiccioli and go to her.

So Mr. Edgcumbe argues; and he makes out his case —a case which we shall find nothing to contradict, and something to confirm when we get back to our story.

CHAPTER XXVII

BYRON'S RELATIONS WITH THE COUNTESS GUICCIOLI AND HER HUSBAND AT RAVENNA

Countess Guiccioli speaks of Byron's regard for her as "the serious attachment which he had wished to avoid, but which had mastered his whole heart, and induced him to live an isolated life with the person he loved in a town of Romagna, far from all that could flatter his vanity and from all intercourse with his countrymen." The account is not altogether inaccurate, but it omits one important fact: the Countess's own resolute insistence that Byron's society was essential to her happiness and even to her life.

At first, it seems clear, his sole objective was the seduction of his neighbour's wife. He was engaged, as he thought, upon an affair not of sentiment but of gallantry; and he had no idea that his neighbour's wife, having consented to be seduced, would expect him to dance attendance on her for ever afterwards. So much seems evident from the letter in which he complains of being dragged to Ravenna in a blazing Italian June. His mistress, however, had compelled him to come by pleading illness; and she did not scruple to repeat that plea as often as she found any difficulty in getting her own way. "I am ill—so ill. Send for Lord Byron or I shall die;" that was the refrain which helped her to reorganise her life.

Having joined her at Ravenna, Byron, as we have seen, accompanied her to Bologna. It was at Bologna that he wrote the love letter, quoted in the preceding chapter, in Madame Guiccioli's copy of "Corinne." From Bologna, too, he wrote to Murray, asking him to use his influence to procure Count Guiccioli a nomination as British Vice-Consul—an unsalaried office which would entitle him to British protection in the event of political disturbances; and at Bologna, finally, occurred Countess Guiccioli's second diplomatic indisposition.

> "Some business," she told Moore, "having called Count Guiccioli to Ravenna, I was obliged by the state of my health, instead of accompanying him, to return to Venice, and he consented that Lord Byron should be the companion of my journey. We left Bologna on September 15.... When I arrived at Venice, the physicians ordered that I should try the country air; and Lord Byron, having a Villa at La Mira, gave it up to me, and came

> to reside there with me. At this place we passed the Autumn."

At this place, too, the plot began to thicken in a manner which throws light upon Count Guiccioli's character. He wrote proposing that Byron should lend him £1000; and when Byron refused to do anything of the kind, seeing that the Count was a richer man than he, he demanded that the Countess should return to him; so that letters of October 29 and November 8 contain these significant passages:

> "Count G. comes to Venice next week, and I am requested to consign his wife to him, which shall be done—with all her linen."

> "Count G. has arrived in Venice, and has presented his spouse (who had preceded him two months for her health and the prescriptions of Dr. Aglietti) with a paper of conditions, regulations of hours and conduct and morals, &c., which he insists on her accepting, and she persists in refusing. I am expressly, it would seem, excluded by this treaty, as an indispensable preliminary; so that they are in high discussion, and what the result may be I know not, particularly as they are consulting friends."

The view of the friends—that is to say of the Italy of the period—was that morals were of little but appearances of great importance. Married women might have lovers—one lover at a time—but their amours must be conducted in their own homes and under their husbands' patronage. By running away with their lovers they put themselves in the wrong; and the men who ran away with them showed themselves ignorant of the manners of good society;

so that Countess Belzoni, who knew all about the draper's wife and the baker's wife and the promiscuous debaucheries of the Mocenigo Palace, remarked to Moore, who was passing through Venice at the time: "It is such a pity, you know. Until he did that, he had been behaving with such perfect propriety."

So the debate proceeded; the girl wife and the sexagenarian husband giving each other pieces of their several minds, and the friends offering good advice to both of them, while Byron, who was excluded from the Council Chamber, sat below and wrote to Murray:

> "As I tell you that the Guiccioli business is on the eve of exploding in one way or the other, I will just add that, without attempting to influence the decision of the Contessa, a good deal depends upon it. If she and her husband make it up you will, perhaps, see me in England sooner than you expect; if not, I shall retire with her to France or America, change my name, and live a quiet provincial life. All this may seem odd, but I have got the poor girl into a scrape; and as neither her birth, nor her rank, nor her connections by birth or marriage are inferior to my own, I am in honour bound to support her through: besides, she is a very pretty woman—ask Moore—and not yet one and twenty."

That, once again, is not the language of a man whom an invincible passion has swept off his feet. It is the language of the man who lets himself be loved rather than of the man who loves—the man who will

preserve an even mind whether he retains his mistress or loses her, and whose affection for her only carries him to the point of saying that, whatever happens, at any rate he will not treat her badly. It is a point, at any rate, beyond that to which his affection for Miss Clairmont ever carried him; but it is hardly the furthest point to which it is possible for love to go.

"With some difficulty, and many internal struggles, I reconciled the lady with her lord," is the language in which Byron relates the upshot of the negotiations. "I think," he continues, "of setting out for England by the Tyrol in a few days"; but only six days later he has changed his plans. "Pray," he then writes to Murray, "let my sister be informed that I am not coming as I intended: I have not the courage to tell her so myself, at least not yet; but I will soon, *with the reasons*." And about the reasons there is, of course, no mystery.

Count Guiccioli, having gained the day, had carried his wife off to Ravenna, and Byron had missed her more than he had expected. Hoppner writes of him as "very much out of spirits, owing to Madame Guiccioli's departure, and out of humour with everybody and everything around him." He had had his belongings packed for his return to England, and had even dressed for the journey, but had changed his mind, and unpacked and undressed again at the last minute; and Madame Guiccioli, in the meantime, had had her third diplomatic indisposition, and threatened yet again to die unless Byron were brought to her. So that presently, on January 2,

1820, we find Byron back again at Ravenna, and giving Moore a curious explanation of his movements:

> "After her arrival at Ravenna the Guiccioli fell ill again too; and at last her father (who had, all along, opposed the *liaison* most violently till now) wrote to me to say that she was in such a state that *he* begged me to come and see her—and that her husband had acquiesced, in consequence of her relapse, and that *he* (her father) would guarantee all this, and that there would be no further scenes in consequence between them, and that I should not be compromised in any way. I set out soon after and have been here ever since. I found her a good deal altered, but getting better."

At first he seems to have supposed that he was merely a visitor like another; and a letter to Hoppner, dated January 20, shows him uncertain as to the duration of his stay:

> "I may stay a day, a week, a year, all my life; but all this depends upon what I can neither see nor foresee. I came because I was called, and will go the moment that I perceive what may render my departure proper. My attachment has neither the blindness of the beginning, nor the microscopic accuracy of the close to such *liaisons*; but 'time and the hour' must decide upon what I do."

Here, yet again, one detects a note of hesitation incompatible with perfect love. The very letter, however, which expresses the hesitations also contains directions for the forwarding of his

furniture, which looks as though Byron already foresaw and accepted his fate. He was destined, in fact, to live with the household of the Guicciolis on the same terms on which he had previously lived with the household of the Segatis—engaging an apartment in their mansion, and paying a rent to the husband while making love to the wife—and to be what the Italians call a *cicisbeo* and the English a tame cat. He admits, in various letters, that that is his position, and that he does not altogether like it. "I can't say," he tells Hobhouse, "that I don't feel the degradation;" but he nevertheless submits to it, describing himself to Hoppner as "drilling very hard to learn how to double a shawl," and giving the same correspondent a graphic picture of his first appearance in his new character:

> "The G.'s object appeared to be to parade her foreign lover as much as possible, and, faith, if she seemed to glory in the scandal, it was not for me to be ashamed of it. Nobody seemed surprised; all the women, on the contrary, were, as it were, delighted with the excellent example. The Vice-legate, and all the other Vices, were as polite as could be; and I, who had acted on the reserve, was fairly obliged to take the lady under my arm, and look as much like a Cicisbeo as I could on so short a notice, to say nothing of the embarrassment of a cocked hat and sword, much more formidable to me than it ever will be to the enemy."

A picture in which no one's part is dignified, and no one's emotions are strained to a tense pitch, but everybody is happy and comfortable in an easy-going way. One gets the same impression from Byron's

reply to Murray's suggestion that he should write "a volume of manners, &c. on Italy." There are many reasons, he says, why he does not care to touch that subject in print; but he assures Murray privately that the Italian morality, though widely different from the English, has nevertheless "its rules and its fitnesses and decorums." The women "exact fidelity from a lover as a debt of honour, while they pay the husband as a tradesman, that is not at all." At the same time, he adds, "the greatest outward respect is to be paid to the husbands, not only by the ladies, but by their *serventi*," so that "you would suppose them relations," and might imagine the *servente* to be "one adopted into the family."

But this was an Arcadian state of things too good to last. Exactly how or why it came to an end one does not know; but probably because, while the Countess was too vehemently in love to control the expression of her feelings, Byron's European importance overshadowed her husband, made him feel foolish, and challenged him to assert himself. Whatever the reason, the arrangement only remained idyllic for about four months, and then, in May 1821, there began to be talk of divorce, "on account of our having been taken together *quasi* in the fact, and, what is worse, that she does not *deny* it."

She was so far from denying it, indeed, that she protested that it was a shame that she should be the only woman in Romagna who was not allowed to have a lover, and declared that, unless her husband did allow her to have a lover, she would not live with him. Her family took her part, saying that her husband, having tolerated her infidelity for so long, had forfeited, his right to make a fuss about it. The ladies of Ravenna, and the populace, also made the

business theirs, and supported the lovers, on general principles, because they were of the age for love and the husband was not, and also because Count Guiccioli was an unpleasant person and unpopular.

He was, indeed, not only unpleasant and unpopular, but also reputed to be a desperate and dangerous character, careful, indeed, of his own elderly skin, but quite capable of hiring bravos to assassinate those who crossed his path. “Warning was given me,” Byron writes to Moore, “not to take such long rides in the Pine Forest without being on my guard;” and again:

> “The principal security is that he has not the courage to spend twenty scudi—the average price of a clean-handed bravo—otherwise there is no want of opportunity, for I ride about the woods every evening, with one servant, and sometimes an acquaintance, who latterly looks a little queer in solitary bits of bushes.”

The peril of violence may have been the greater because the Count could not find a lawyer willing to take up his case; the advocates declining, as one man, to act for him on the ground that he was either a fool or a knave—a fool if he had been unaware of the liaison and a knave if he had connived at it and “waited for some bad end to divulge it.” The stiletto, however, remained in its sheath, and the matter, after all, was settled in the Courts. The Countess, supported by her family, applied for the separation which she had previously resisted; and the Count, on his part, resisted the separation which he had previously demanded, raising particular objections to the claim that he should pay alimony.

But he had to pay it. The papal Court decreed a separation, fixing Madame Guiccioli's allowance at £200 a year, but, at the same time, ordained with that indifference to liberty and justice which distinguishes Churches whenever they attain temporal power, that the wife whose injuries it was professing to redress, should not be allowed to live with her lover, but must either reside in the house of her parents or get her to a nunnery. She went on July 16 to a villa about fifteen miles from Ravenna. Byron visited her there twice a month, but continued to occupy his hired apartment in her husband's house—a fact which by itself sufficiently justifies his reiterated protests that the manners and customs of Italy are beyond the comprehension of the English. A letter to Moore dated August 31 gives us his own view of his proceedings as well as of the relations which he conceives to subsist between genius and disorder:

> "I verily believe that nor you nor any man of poetical temperament can avoid a strong passion of some kind. It is the poetry of life. What should I have known or written had I been a quiet mercantile politician or a lord-in-waiting? A man must travel and turmoil, or there is no existence. Besides, I only meant to be a Cavalier Servente, and had no idea it would turn out a romance in the Anglo fashion."

So that we find Byron launched yet again on a new way of life—the last before his final and famous transference of his energies from love to revolutionary politics.

Evidently it was a relief to him to find himself a

lover instead of a cavaliere servente—even at the risk of having a dagger planted, on some dark night, between his shoulder blades. Evidently, too, he loved "the lady whom I serve" better than he had loved her at the beginning of the liaison, and better than he was to love her towards the end of it. But, even so, it was no absorbing love that possessed him—no love that diverted his thoughts from morbid introspection, or made him feel that, merely by loving, he had fulfilled his destiny and played a worthy part in life. On the contrary he could write in the Diary which he then kept for six weeks or so: "I go to my bed with a heaviness of heart at having lived so long, and to so little purpose;" and he could compose the well-known epigram:

Through life's road, so dim and dirty,
I have dragged to three-and-thirty.
What have these years left to me?
Nothing—except thirty-three.

Nationalism, movements, risings, revolutions, and the rest of it might well seem a welcome excitement to a man so *blasé* and so inured to sensations that love, though he vowed that he "loved entirely" could not lift him to a more exalted frame of mind than that; and his attachment to Madame Guiccioli may well have gained an element of permanence from the fact that she belonged to a family of conspirators in league against priests and kings.

CHAPTER XXVIII

REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITIES— REMOVAL FROM RAVENNA TO PISA

The origin of Byron's revolutionary opinions is wrapped in mystery. He certainly was not born a revolutionist; there is no record of his becoming one for definite reasons at any definite moment of time; and if it were alleged that he assumed revolutionism for the sake of swagger and effect, or had it thrust upon him by the household of the Gambas, the propositions, though pretty obviously untrue, could not very easily be disproved.

What he chiefly lacked in the character of revolutionist was the fine enthusiasm of the men of 1789, their pathetic belief in the perfectibility of human nature, and their zeal for equality and fraternity as things of equal account with liberty. His view of human nature was thoroughly cynical, and he was far too proudly conscious of his own place in the social hierarchy to aspire to be merely citizen Byron in a world from which all honorific distinctions had disappeared. Indeed we find him, in some of his letters, actually gibing at Hobhouse because his activities as a political agitator have brought him into contact with ill-bred associates; and that, as will be admitted, is a strange tone for a sincere revolutionist to take.

Nor was Byron ever an argumentative revolutionist of the school of the philosophic Radicals. Neither in his letters nor in his other writings does he give reasons for his revolutionary faith. He presents

himself there as one who is a revolutionist as a matter of course—one to whom it could not possibly occur to be anything but a revolutionist. As for his motives, he assumes that we know them, or that they do not concern us, or else he leaves us to guess them, or to infer them from our general knowledge of his character and circumstances.

Apparently, since guess-work is our resource, he was a Revolutionist in Italy for much the same reason for which he had been a protector of small boys at Harrow. The same generous instinct which had made him hate bullies then made him hate oppressors now; and he hated them the more because he perceived that oppression was buttressed by hypocrisy. In particular he saw the Italians bullied by the Austrians in the name of the so-called Holy Alliance —that unpleasant group of potentates whose fanaticism was exploited by the cunning of Metternich, and who invoked the name of God and the principle of divine right for the crushing of national aspirations. That was enough to set him now sighing for “a forty-parson power” to “snuffle the praises of the Holy Three,” now proposing that the same Three should be “shipped off to Senegal,” and to enlist his sympathies on the Italian side. The rest depended upon circumstances; and the determining circumstances were that he was an active man on a loose end, and that his lot was cast among conspirators.

He was ready to conspire because of the trend of his sympathies; he actually conspired, in the first instance, partly to please the Gambas, and partly because he was bored; and his appetite grew with what it fed upon. It was not merely that conspiracy furnished him with occupation—the cause at the

same time furnished him with an ideal, of which he was beginning to feel the need. Living for himself he had made a mess of his life; and his relations with Madame Guiccioli did not conceal the fact from him. His love for her was a pastime, and no more an end in itself than his attachment to the draper's wife at Venice. But he felt the need of some end in itself, unrelated to his personal concerns, to round off his life, give it unity and consistency, and make it a progressive drama instead of a mere series of unrelated incidents; and he found that end in espousing the cause of oppressed nationalities.

No doubt there were other influences simultaneously at work. The most effective altruist is always something of an egoist as well; and it is likely enough that Byron heard the promptings of personal ambition as well as the bitter cry of outcast peoples. His place in a revolutionary army could not be that of a private soldier—he was bound to be its picturesque figure-head if not its actual leader; and that meant much at a time when all the Liberals of Europe closely followed every attempt to shake off the Austrian, or the Prussian, or the Papal yoke. So that here was his clear chance to rehabilitate himself—to issue from his obscure retreat in a sudden blaze of glory, and set the prophets saying that the stone which the builders rejected had become the head-stone of the corner. But, however that may be, and however much or little that object may have been present to his mind, it is at all events from the time of his active association with revolutionary movements that Byron's life in exile begins to acquire seriousness and dignity.

So much in broad outline. The details, when we come to look for them, are obscure, insignificant, and

disappointing. He joined the Carbonari, and was made the head of one of their sections—the Capo of the Americani was his official designation; but the Carbonari, though a furious, were a feeble folk. They had signs, and passwords, and secret meeting-places in the forest, and they whispered any quantity of sedition; but their secrets were "secrets de Polichinelle." Spies lurked behind every door and listened at every keyhole, and their intentions were better known to the police than to themselves.

A rising was proposed and even planned. The poet's letters to his publisher are full of dark references to the terrible things about to happen. A row is imminent, and he means to be in the thick of it. Heads are likely to be broken, and his own shall be risked with the rest. All other projects must be postponed to that contingency. He cannot even come to England as he had intended, to attend to his private affairs. And so on, in a series of letters, in one of which we find the significantly prophetic question, honoured with a paragraph to itself: "What thinkst thou of Greece?" It is the beginning, at last, of the awakening of Byron's sterner and more serious self—the first occasion on which we see the fierce joys of battle clearly meaning more to him than the soft delights of love.

Only there was to be no battle this time, and hardly even a skirmish, and, in fact, very little beyond a scare. The Austrians were watching the Romagnese border much as a cat watches a mouse-hole. A week or so before the proposed insurrection was to have taken place, an Austrian army crossed the Po, and the proposed insurgents scattered and hid themselves. It only remained for the Government to arrest those of them whom it desired to keep under

lock and key, and expel those whom it preferred to get rid of.

Byron himself might very well have been lodged in an Austrian or Papal gaol through a scurvy trick played on him by some of the conspirators. He had provided a number of them with arms at his expense; and then the decree went forth that all persons found in possession of arms were to be treated as rebels. Whereupon the chicken-hearted crew came running to the Guiccioli Palace and begged Byron to take back his muskets. He was out at the time, but returned from his ride to find his apartment turned into an armoury; and it still remains uncertain whether he escaped molestation, as he thought, because his servants did not betray him, or, as seems more probable, because the Government preferred not to have such an embarrassing prisoner on their hands.

If he would have been embarrassing as a prisoner, however, he was equally embarrassing as a resident; and, as his expulsion might have made a noise, it was decided to manœuvre him out of the country by expelling the Gambas. Where they went Madame Guiccioli would have to go too, and where she went Byron might be expected to follow. We get his version of the story, together with a glimpse at his feelings, and at the new struggle in his mind between love and ambition, in a letter to Moore dated September 19, 1821;

> “I am all in the sweat, dust, and blasphemy of an universal packing of all my things, furniture &c., for Pisa, whither I go for the winter. The cause has been the exile of all my fellow Carbonics, and, amongst them, of

> the whole family of Madame G.; who, you know, was divorced from her husband, last week, 'on account of P. P. clerk of this parish,' and who is obliged to join her family and relatives, now in exile there, to avoid being shut up in a monastery, because the Pope's decree of separation required her to reside in *casa paterna*, or else, for decorum's sake, in a convent. As I could not say, with Hamlet, 'Get thee to a nunnery,' I am preparing to follow them.
>
> "It is awful work, this love, and prevents all a man's projects of good or glory. I wanted to go to Greece lately (as everything seems up here), with her brother, who is a very fine, brave fellow (I have seen him put to the proof) and wild about liberty. But the tears of a woman who has left her husband for a man, and the weakness of one's own heart, are paramount to these projects, and I can hardly indulge them."

Greece again, it will be observed, and an indication that Byron is at last more anxious to be up and doing something as the champion of desperate causes than to lie bound with silken chains about the feet of a mistress! A proof, too, that his mistress, on her part, already perceiving that causes may be her rivals, feels the need of working on his feelings with her tears! Moore prints the letters in which she appeals to him in the first excitement of her passions and apprehensions: "Help me, my dear Byron, for I am in a situation most terrible; and without you I can resolve upon nothing." She has received, it seems, a passport, and also an intimation that she must either return to her husband or go to a convent. Not

suspecting that passport and intimation came from the same source, she talks of the necessity of escaping by night lest the passport should be taken from her. She is in despair, and cannot bear the thought of never seeing Byron again. If that is to be the result of quitting Romagna, then she will remain and let them immure her, regarding that as the less melancholy fate. And so forth, in language which may be merely hysterical, but more probably indicates a waning confidence in her lover.

But her tears prevailed. Byron, it is true, lingered at Ravenna for some months after her departure; but that is a circumstance of which we must not make too much. He had his apartment at Ravenna; he had his belongings about him; and they were considerable, including not only furniture, and books, and manuscripts, and horses, and carriages, and dogs and cats, but a large menagerie of miscellaneous live-stock. He could hardly be expected to go until he and the Gambas had arranged where to settle; and their arrangements called for much discussion and balancing of pros and cons.

It was during the time of indecision that Shelley came, at his request, to visit him; and we may take Shelley's letters to Peacock as our next testimony to his way of life. His establishment, Shelley reports, "consists, besides servants, of ten horses, eight enormous dogs, five cats, an eagle, a crow and a falcon;" and in a postscript he adds: "I find that my enumeration of the animals in this Circæan Palace was defective, and that in a material point. I have just met, on the grand staircase, five peacocks, two guinea-hens, and an Egyptian crane." Then he proceeds:

> "Lord Byron gets up at two. I get up, quite contrary to my usual custom (but one must sleep or die, like Southey's sea-snake in *Kehama*) at twelve. After breakfast we sit talking till six. From six till eight we gallop through the pine forests which divide Ravenna from the sea. We then come home and dine, and sit up gossiping till six in the morning."

They gossiped about many things, and considered, among other matters, what would be the best place for Byron, the Gambas, and Madame Guiccioli to live in. Switzerland had been proposed, but Shelley urged objections which Byron admitted to be sound. Switzerland was "little fitted for him." The English colonies would be likely to "torment him as they did before," ostentatiously sending him to Coventry, and then spying on him when there. The consequence of his exasperation might be "a relapse of libertinism," a return to the Venetian way of life, "which he says he plunged into not from taste, but from despair."

Perhaps the last-named danger was rather less than Shelley supposed; for the drapers' and bakers' wives of Geneva and the Canton of Vaud are neither so attractive nor so accommodating as those of Venice; but, on the whole, this wayward sprite, as he is commonly esteemed—so wayward that he had been expelled from his University and had sacrificed a large fortune to an unnecessary quarrel with his father—showed common sense and worldly wisdom in his advice. He showed so much of it, indeed, and showed it so clearly, that Byron begged him to write to Madame Guiccioli and put the case to her; which he duly did "in lame Italian," eliciting an answer very eloquent of his correspondent's growing anxiety

as to her hold upon Byron's heart. Madame Guiccioli agreed to the proposal, but then begged a favour: "Pray do not leave Ravenna without taking Milord with you."

But that, of course, was rather too much to ask. The most that Shelley could promise was that he would undertake every arrangement on Byron's behalf for his establishment at Pisa, and would then "assail him with importunities," if these should be necessary, to rejoin his mistress; and it seems that they were necessary, for two months or more later, we find Shelley writing to him: "When may we expect you? The Countess G. is very patient, though sometimes she seems apprehensive that you will never leave Ravenna."

The Countess, indeed, in supplying Moore with biographical material, showed herself at her wit's end to devise excuses for Byron's delay, not too wounding to her vanity; and Shelley, at the time, showed a tendency to reconsider his estimate of their relations: "La Guiccioli," he wrote in October, "is a very pretty, sentimental, innocent Italian, who has sacrificed an immense fortune for the sake of Lord Byron, and who, if I know anything of my friend, of her, and of human nature, will hereafter have plenty of leisure and opportunity to repent her rashness." It was a harsh judgment, based in part, no doubt, on what Shelley had been told of Byron's treatment of Miss Clairmont; but it indicated a real danger-spot.

Byron had ceased to love passionately, if he had ever done so, and he did not love blindly. We need not, indeed, accept Miss Clairmont's statement that, at the end, he was "sick to death of Madame Guiccioli," and that it was chiefly for the purpose of escaping

from her that he joined the Greek insurgents. That utterance was the voice of a jealous woman endeavouring to appease her own affronted pride. But though there was no question of Byron's giving Madame Guiccioli a rival of her own sex, she was now destined to encounter the rivalry, hardly less serious, of his political interests and ambitions. All through the period of his residence at Ravenna things had been working towards that conclusion; and the circumstances of the removal showed how near they had now got to it.

> "We were divided in choice," Byron wrote to Moore, "between Switzerland and Tuscany, and I gave my vote for Pisa, as nearer the Mediterranean, which I love for the sake of the shores which it washes, and for my young recollections of 1809. Switzerland is a curst selfish, swinish country of brutes, placed in the most romantic region of the world. I never could bear the inhabitants, and still less their English visitors; for which reason, after writing for some information about houses, upon hearing that there was a colony of English all over the cantons of Geneva, &c., I immediately gave up the thought, and persuaded the Gambas to do the same."

Which is true enough as far as it goes, but is something less than the whole truth, since it omits to mention the increasing seriousness in Byron's character, and his new tendency to transfer the bitterness of his indignation from the authors of his own wrongs to the political tyrants of the political school of Metternich.

Switzerland could afford no scope, in that direction, for his energies. The Swiss, it is true, have their revolutions from time to time; but these are petty and trivial. Strangers have a difficulty in understanding the points at issue; and the interference of strangers is not solicited. The revolutionist from abroad is only welcome in Switzerland when he is resting, or when a price is put upon his head—neither of which conditions Byron could claim to fulfil. In Italy, however, and over against Greece, he would be in the midst of the

most hospitable revolutionists in the world; and his chance of passing from love and literature to fighting and statesmanship was bound to come to him if he would wait for it.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TRIVIAL ROUND AT PISA

From Ravenna to Pisa, from Pisa to Genoa, from Genoa to Cephalonia, from Cephalonia to Missolonghi and an untimely death in a great cause still very far from victory—these are the remaining stages of the pilgrimage. We have a cloud of witnesses—Shelley, Leigh Hunt, Trelawny, Medwin, Lady Blessington, and others; but only the merest fragment of their long depositions can be presented here.

The life at Pisa, where Byron at last arrived in November 1822, was, at first, quite commonplace and uneventful. One reads of a trivial round of functions rather than of duties punctually discharged at the same hour of every day. Byron, we gather, lay late in bed, but ultimately rose, and ate biscuits and drank soda-water, and received the visits of his English acquaintances, and rode out with them to an inn, and practised shooting at a mark, and then rode

home again. After that came dinner, and a call upon the Gambas, and an interview with Madame Guiccioli; and then, that ceremony finished, the late hours of the night and early hours of the morning were devoted, sometimes to conversation, but more often to literary composition. That was all; and it would have seemed little enough if the witnesses had not taken the view that, whatever Byron did, he was giving a performance, and that whoever saw him do it was a privileged spectator at a private view and under an obligation to report the spectacle.

They did take that view, however, and devoted themselves, in the modern phraseology, to "interviewing" Byron. He was so different from them—so much greater—and so much more interesting—that they could no more converse with him lightly, on common topics and on equal terms, than they could so converse with a monster advertised as the leading attraction of a freak museum. Shelley, indeed, might do so, being his friend as well as his admirer, and one who moved naturally on the same plane of thought; but the others could only approach him humbly from below, sit at his feet, and talk to him about himself. After his back was turned, they might presume to quiz and satirise—Leigh Hunt did so, and so, too, to a less extent, did both Trelawny and Lady Blessington; but, at the time, they could get no further than begging permission to ask questions.

The permission was always accorded. Byron had never seriously resisted the doctrine that his private affairs were of public interest; and he had, at this period of his life, completely succumbed to it. No topic was so delicate that his interlocutors felt any obligation to avoid it. His quarrel with Lady Byron; his adventures with Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady

Oxford, his excursions into inebriety with Sheridan and Scrope Davies; his losses at hazard with the dandies; the moral laxity of the Venetian interlude; the placid pleasure which he found in his relations with Madame Guiccioli: on all these topics he talked at large and at length whenever any stray companion started them. His readiness thus to gossip with all comers on his most intimate affairs is noticed somewhere by Hobhouse as one of the gravest defects of his character; but very likely there was not much else to talk about in that dull provincial town; and in any case Byron did not invariably tell the truth.

Trelawny says that he delighted to "bam" those who conversed with him; but that queer slang word has long since gone out of date. A more modern way of putting it would be to say that he liked to "gas," having no inconsiderable contempt for those who tried to pump him, and being more anxious to tell them things that would astonish them than to supply them with accurate information. Having left London in the days of the dandies, he had taken some of the ideals of the dandies to Italy with him, though he had coated them with a cosmopolitan veneer. He still liked to swagger in the style of a buck of the Regency who spared neither man in his anger nor woman in his lust and could carry any quantity of claret with heroic lightness of heart. Or, at all events, he liked to swagger in that way from time to time; though one can see, collating the confidences with the letters, that there were also moments at which the mask was lifted and the real man appeared.

But the real man was also a new man—or, at all events, a man whose character was undergoing a radical transformation under the very eyes of his

friends. Shelley seems to have been the only one of them who perceived the change—he is, at any rate, the only one who has recorded it. Byron, he said, was "becoming a virtuous man;" and the expression may pass, and may be regarded as confirmed by the testimony of the other companions, if we do not give the word "virtue" too rigid an interpretation. The Venetian libertinism had been left behind for ever. With it had been left the old passions and the old bitterness, and the old lack of aim or of ambition to do more than enrapture the women and rub the self-righteous the wrong way. Byron, in fact, was becoming calm, tolerant, practical and sincere—learning to look forward instead of backward—a man who was at last ready, and even resolved, to make sacrifices in order to achieve.

Even his feelings towards Lady Byron and her family seem to have undergone a change at about this time, though not a change which indicated any probability of reconciliation. A little while before, at Ravenna, he had composed two epigrams on the subject: one addressed "To Medea," on the anniversary of his wedding:

> "*This day of all our days has done*
> *The most for me and you;*
> *'Tis just six years since we were* One
> *And* five *since we were Two!*"

and the second on hearing simultaneously that *Marino Faliero* had failed on the stage, and that Lady Noel had recovered from an illness which had seemed likely to be fatal:

> "*Behold the blessing of a lucky lot!*
> *My play is* damned, *and Lady Noel not.*"

Now, at Pisa, we find him acknowledging the gift of a lock of his child's hair, and writing to Lady Byron thus:

> "The time which has elapsed since the separation has been considerably more than the whole brief period of our union, and the not much longer one of our prior acquaintance. We both made a bitter mistake; but now it is over, and irrevocably so. For, at thirty-three on my part, and a few years less on yours, though it is no very extended period of life, still it is one when the habits and thought are generally so formed as to admit of no modification; and as we could not agree when younger, we should with difficulty do so now."

And also:

> "Whether the offence has been solely on my side, or reciprocal, or on yours chiefly, I have ceased to reflect upon any but two things—viz. that you are the mother of my child, and that we shall never meet again. I think if you also consider the two corresponding points with reference to myself, it will be better for all three."

The letter, for whatever reason, was never sent; but it has, nevertheless, its value as a document illustrative of Byron's ultimate attitude towards the great blunder of his life. There is no renewal of love, and no desire for the renewal of intimate relations; but, on the other hand, there is no more angry talk about shattered household gods. Instead, there is a new spirit of toleration. Byron recognises, at last, that Lady Byron has a perfect right to be the sort of

woman that she is—that she may even be a woman of some merit, though on him her very virtues jar. So he takes the tone of a man who parleys politely under a flag of truce; and then turns and goes his way, a little disappointed perhaps, but on the whole indifferent. He had thought it worth while to send Lady Byron messages about the pleasure which he found in the company of the Venetian harlots; but he sent her none about the charms of Madame Guiccioli. He had travelled too far from her for that, and got too completely out of touch with her, and acquired too many new interests which she did not share.

It should be added, however, that in many of his new interests Madame Guiccioli herself hardly shared. She was a charming woman—almost exactly the woman to suit him—pretty and plump and intelligent, and yet ready to acquiesce in his habit of regarding her sex from the standpoint of an Oriental Satrap. It gratified him to relapse into her society when strenuous activities had tired him; for he found her restful as well as amiable. But her affection was no substitute for those strenuous activities; and his need for her love seems to have diminished as the desire to assert and prove himself by doing something strenuous and striking grew upon him. An eloquent fact is that, having suspended the writing of "Don Juan" at her request, he presently resumed it—and that though her objection to "Don Juan" was that it stripped the sentiment from love; which indicates that, though he still loved her in his fashion, he loved no more than he chose to, and certainly not enough to let his love stand between him and any serious enterprise.

There are biographers, indeed, who doubt whether he would have been willing to marry Madame

Guiccioli if unexpected circumstances had enabled him to do so; but, according to Lady Blessington, the irregularity of their relations was a cause of great distress to him:

> "I am bound by the indissoluble ties of marriage to *one* who will *not* live with me, and live with one to whom I cannot give a legal right to be my companion, and who, wanting that right, is placed in a position humiliating to her and most painful to me. Were the Countess Guiccioli and I married, we should, I am sure, be cited as an example of conjugal happiness, and the domestic and retired life we lead would entitle us to respect. But our union, wanting the legal and religious part of the ceremony of marriage, draws on us both censure and blame. She is formed to make a good wife to any man to whom she attaches herself. She is fond of retirement, is of a most affectionate disposition, and noble-minded and disinterested to the highest degree. Judge then how mortifying it must be to me to be the cause of placing her in a false position. All this is not thought of when people are blinded by passion, but when passion is replaced by better feelings—those of affection, friendship, and confidence—when, in short, the *liaison* has all of marriage but its forms, then it is that we wish to give it the respectability of wedlock."

Such is the report, confirming the view that the ardour of Byron's passion had by this time burnt itself out, and exhibiting him in the novel light of a lover tired of love-making but desirous of

domestication. The desire does, at times, overtake even the most disorderly; and it is credible enough that Byron had come to entertain it. He had entertained it once before, on the eve of his marriage; and it is the kind of desire that recurs even after the first experiments have proved unsatisfactory. So it was with Byron, the wife, and not the estate of matrimony, being held responsible for the failure; only the desire was not, in his case, the ruling passion. That passion was to do something, and to be seen doing it, the second condition being as essential as the first, in defence of the victims of the Holy Alliance or any other tyranny.

It was a passion destined very soon to be gratified, the end coming in a dismal swamp, but in a blaze of glory. We will tell the story—or as much of it as needs to be told—in a moment; but we must first attend Byron a little longer on the trivial round—riding out to the inn, and shooting at a mark, and riding home again—in order that we may note how certain deaths and other incidents aided and threw light upon the further development of his character.

CHAPTER XXX

FROM PISA TO GENOA

It was while Byron was at Pisa that his natural daughter, the little Allegra, died, after a rapid illness, of typhus fever at her Convent School. He disliked her mother—we have noted the reasons why it was hardly to be expected that he would do anything else—but he had viewed the child as the gift of heaven, precious, though at first undesired. He had played with her in his garden at Ravenna, and had made a will leaving her £5000, and was at once too fond and too proud to make any mystery of the relationship. All his friends, as well as his sister were apprised of it, and received news, from time to time, of the child's physical and moral progress. Nearly all of them were informed of her death. "It is a heavy blow for many reasons, but must be borne—with time," he wrote to Murray. "The blow was stunning and unexpected," he told Shelley. "I suppose that Time will do his usual work—Death has done his." To Sir Walter Scott he commented:

> "The only consolation, save time, is that she is either at rest or happy; for her few years (only five), prevented her from having incurred any sin, except what we inherit from Adam."

He desired, too, that the child's relationship to him should be proclaimed on a tablet to be set up in Harrow Church; but that was impossible owing to the prejudices of the Vicar and Churchwardens. It seemed to them that "every man of refined taste, to say nothing of sound morals," would practise hypocrisy in such a matter. The Vicar wrote to Murray to say so, and to ask him to point out to Byron that, in the case of ex-parishioners, the Churchwardens had the power not only to advise hypocrisy but to enforce it; and he enclosed a formal

prohibition from one of them, running thus:

> "*Honoured Sir*,
>
> I object on behalf of the parish to admit the tablet of Lord Byron's child into the church.
>
> "*James Winkley, Churchwarden.*"

It was the pitiful performance of a clerical Jack-in-Office; and we will leave it and pass on, merely noting that Byron, more than once, in defining his duties to Allegra, affirmed and illustrated his own religious position. One of his avowed reasons for not allowing her to be brought up by her mother was that Jane Clairmont was "atheistical." For himself, he said, he was "a very good Christian," though given to expressing himself flippantly. The affirmation is confirmed by Shelley's description of him, half playful and half-shocked, as "no better than a Christian," and by the account of his opinions given by Pietro Gamba in a letter to Dr. Kennedy—from which it appears that though Byron might, like his own Cain, defy the God of the Shorter Catechism, he was profoundly reverent in his attitude towards really holy things.

Count Pietro reports two conversations with him on these sacred matters; the first talk taking place at Ravenna:

> "We were riding together in the Pineta on a beautiful Spring day. 'How,' said Byron, 'when we raise our eyes to heaven, or direct them to the earth, can we doubt of the existence of God? or how, turning them inwards, can we doubt that there is something within us, more noble and more

> durable than the clay of which we are formed? Those who do not hear, or are unwilling to listen to these feelings, must necessarily be of a vile nature.' I answered him with all those reasons which the superficial philosophy of Helvetius, his disciples and his masters, have taught. Byron replied with very strong arguments, and profound eloquence, and I perceived that obstinate contradiction on this subject, which forced him to reason upon it, gave him pain."

Later, at Genoa, the subject came up again:

> "In various ways I heard him confirm the sentiments which I have already mentioned to you.
>
> "'Why, then,' said I to him, 'have you earned for yourself the name of impious, and enemy of all religious belief, from your writings?' He answered, 'They are not understood, and are wrongly interpreted by the malevolent. My object is only to combat hypocrisy, which I abhor in everything, and particularly in religion, and which now unfortunately appears to me to be prevalent, and for this alone do those to whom you allude wish to render me odious and make me out worse than I am.'"

Decidedly we have a more serious Byron there—a child becoming a man, emerging from frivolity, and putting away frivolous and childish things; and one gets the same impression of mental and moral evolution repeated when one reads Byron's appreciation of Shelley, written under the shock of

the news of his sudden death—passages which it is a labour of love to copy out:

> "I presume you have heard that Mr. Shelley and Captain Williams were lost on the 7th ultimo in their passage from Leghorn to Spezzia, in their own open boat. You may imagine the state of their families: I never saw such a scene, nor wish to see another. You were all brutally mistaken about Shelley, who was, without exception, the *best* and least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison."

> "There is thus another man gone, about whom the world was ill-naturedly, and ignorantly, and brutally mistaken. It will, perhaps, do him justice *now*, when he can be no better for it."

> "You are all mistaken about Shelley. You do not know how mild, how tolerant, how good he was in society; and as perfect a gentleman as ever crossed a drawing-room, when he liked, and where he liked."

Those are the appreciations; and one quotes them, not for Shelley's sake, but for Byron's, and because the power to appreciate Shelley's worth in spite of his eccentricities is a test of character. His shining spirituality cannot be perceived by the gross who are in bondage to the conventions of ethics, politics, or religion, or by those, not less gross, who are the slaves of their lusts. To love him was impossible except for one who looked beyond the material to the ideal. It is so now, and it was more especially so in his lifetime, when belief in his wickedness was

almost an article of the Christian faith. But Byron stands the test, and his relations with Shelley are further proofs of his final progress towards moral grandeur.

One cannot say the same of his relations with Leigh Hunt; but then Leigh Hunt was a very different sort of person from Shelley; and his behaviour towards Byron was peculiar. Invited to Pisa to arrange for the production of a new newspaper or magazine, he arrived with a sick wife and several children, with no visible means of support, and with the ill-concealed intention of sponging up innumerable guineas from the stores of the originators of the enterprise. The guineas were not refused to him. Byron seems to have let him have about five hundred guineas in all, as well as some valuable copyrights and board and lodging for himself and his family on the ground floor of his own palace. He found the noisy children a nuisance, however, and resented the desire to sponge; with the result that relations were quickly strained, and the reluctant host and clamorous guest regarded each other with suspicion and dislike.

One of Hunt's complaints was that the guineas, instead of being poured into his lap in a continual golden shower, were doled out, a few at a time, by a steward. Another was that there was a point in the palace which no member of the household of the Hunts was allowed to pass without a special invitation, and that a savage bull-dog was stationed there to guard the passage. The former precaution was probably quite necessary, and the latter charge is probably untrue; though, the palace being full of bull-dogs, and the Hunt children being, as Byron said, "far from tractable," one can readily imagine the nature of the incident on which it was based. In

any case, however, the essential facts of the situation are that Byron, though he had once been sufficiently in sympathy with Hunt to visit him when in prison, for calling the Regent a fat Adonis of fifty, now found that he disliked him, and kept him at arm's length; while Hunt, on his part, taking offence at the aloofness of Byron's attitude, avenged himself by writing a very spiteful book, full of unpleasant truths not only about Byron, but also about Madame Guiccioli.

The Countess, he says, did not know how to "manage" Byron. When he "shocked" her, she replied by "nagging"—the prime offence, it will be remembered, of Lady Byron herself. It was a policy which might have served when she was in the full bloom of youth; but that happy time was passing. She was beginning to look old and weary, and to go about as one who carried a secret sorrow locked up in her breast. "Everybody" noticed the change: "In the course of a few months she seemed to have lived as many years. It is most likely in that interval that she discovered that she had no real hold on the affections of her companion."

Assuredly if Hunt had nothing better to do in Italy than to take notes of this character it was high time to pack him off home again; and packed off he was, in due course, though not quite immediately. Before his departure Byron had moved from Pisa to Genoa, driven to this further migration by the fact that the Tuscan Government had in its turn, expelled the Gambas, and that Madame Guiccioli, for reasons already explained, was once more obliged to accompany them. If he had been as anxious to be rid of her as Hunt hints, and Cordy Jeaffreson, leaning upon Hunt's testimony, explicitly declares, here was

his opportunity. He did not take it, but accompanied her to her new home, where he was to live under the same roof with her; one of Hunt's minor grievances being that he and his children—described by Byron in a letter to Mrs. Shelley as "dirtier and more mischievous than Yahoos"—were not admitted to the same boat with them, but had to travel in a separate felucca. Afterwards there was some talk of a further trip of the nature of a honey-moon—*solus cum sola*—to Naples; but this, for whatever reason, did not take place, and Byron remained at Genoa.

It was at Genoa that he met Lady Blessington, whose report of his regret that there was no way of regularising his intimacy with Madame Guiccioli we have already had before us. She and Leigh Hunt, if they do not contradict each other at every point, at least give very contrary impressions of the state of things. The difference may be due to the fact that, whereas Leigh Hunt was borrowing money with great difficulty, Lady Blessington was flirting with some success. Neither she nor Byron meant anything by it. Count d'Orsay, no less than Countess Guiccioli, barred the way to anything approaching attachment or intrigue. Lady Blessington only flirted to flatter her vanity; Byron only for the purpose of killing time and introducing variety into a somewhat monotonous life. Flirtation there was, however, or at all events the semblance of it, and one may fairly suppose it to afford a partial explanation of Countess Guiccioli's nagging and martyred look, observed by Leigh Hunt's prying eyes. Indeed there are passages in Lady Blessington's Journal which suggest as much, the passage, for instance, in which Byron is reported as saying, not that he "was" but that he "had been" passionately in love with the Countess; and then this passage:

> "Byron is a strange *mélange* of good and evil, the predominancy of either depending wholly on the humour he may happen to be in. His is a character that Nature totally unfitted for domestic habits, or for rendering a woman of refinement or susceptibility happy. He confesses to me that he is not happy, but admits that it is his own fault, as the Contessa Guiccioli, the only object of his love, has all the qualities to render a reasonable being happy. I observed, *à propos* to some observation he had made, that I feared La Contessa Guiccioli had little reason to be satisfied with her lot. He answered: 'Perhaps you are right: yet she must know that I am sincerely attached to her; but the truth is, my habits are not those requisite to form the happiness of any woman. I am worn out in feelings; for, though only thirty-six, I feel sixty in mind, and am less capable than ever of those nameless attentions that all women, but above all Italian women, require. I like solitude, which has become absolutely necessary to me; am fond of shutting myself up for hours, and, when with the person I like, am often *distrait* and gloomy.'"

A man does not talk like that to a woman with whom he has just become acquainted unless he is flirting with her—albeit, it may be, giving her to understand, while in the act of flirting, that his heart is too withered to be long responsive to her charms. And that, it seems, at the end of many love affairs, was Byron's final note. Even Madame Guiccioli did not really matter to him, though he acknowledged obligations to her and discharged them. Nothing

mattered except one memory which, though it could never be anything more than a memory, still haunted him. He lived with that memory to the last, as we shall see. Being only a memory, and a painful one, it was rather a stimulus to action than a hindrance to it. But with the luxurious and uxorious love which does hinder action he had done. Whether he was tired of it or not, he felt that it was unworthy of him, and that life held nobler possibilities.

To an unknown lady who seems, at this date, to have offered him the free gift of her love, he answered, pooh-poohing the proposition. He looked upon love, he said, as "a sort of hostile transaction, very necessary to make or to break matches, but by no means a sinecure to the parties concerned." He added that he regarded his own "love times" as "pretty well over"; and so in fact they were. He needed a sharper spur than they could give him, and a more heroic issue than they could involve, if, during the few years left to him, he was to redeem the time and startle the world by deeds of which it had not imagined him to be capable. The revolt in Greece gave him his chance and he took it.

His sympathies, as we have seen, had long been enlisted on the Greek side, as had also those of the Gambas. Now the London Greek Committee placed itself in communication with him. "I cannot express to you," he wrote to Edward Blaquière, "how much I feel interested in the cause, and nothing but the hopes I entertained of witnessing the liberation of Italy itself prevented me long ago from returning to do what little I could, as an individual, in that land which it is an honour even to have visited." To Sir John Bowring he added a significant detail: "To this project the only objection is of a domestic nature,

and I shall try to get over it."

He did get over it; and those who knew him best were confident that he would; but the fact that Madame Guiccioli tried to detain him is to be remarked as explaining a good deal. It explains why he did not care to take her to Greece, or even to the Ionian Islands, with him, fearing lest she should be a clog on his activities. It explains the comparative coldness of the letters which he addressed to her from the scene of action. It explains finally, if any explanation be needed, why hers was not the memory which he chose to live with in the dismal swamp in which his last days were passed.

And so off to Cephalonia with young Trelawny and Pietro Gamba.

CHAPTER XXXI

DEPARTURE FOR GREECE

A book might be written—indeed more than one book has been written—about that picturesque last phase of Byron's life which dazzled the imagination of mankind. Coming to it at the end of a book already long, one owes it to one's sense of proportion to treat it briefly, noting only the outstanding facts.

The details, when all is said, are of small importance. What matters is that here is an instance, almost unique in history, of a poet transforming himself into a man of action, and proving himself a very competent man of action, very sober and sensible, and quite free from the characteristic vices of the poetical and artistic temperaments.

So far, though he had succeeded as a poet, Byron had failed as a man. The one deep and sincere passion of his life had only made trouble for him; and still more trouble had been made by his own violence, and vanity, and faults of temper. Through them he had allowed himself to be manœuvred into a false position from which, in the bitterness of his indignation at the injustice done to him, he had made no serious effort to escape. Sitting in the midst of the wreck of his household gods, he had given vent to his anger in winged words; while, at the same time, making the persecution which he endured an excuse for sensual indulgence. Sensuality had wrecked his health without yielding him any real satisfaction, and, of course, without giving his censors any reason to reconsider their disapproval. He understood now what a poor figure he would have cut, in the eyes alike of his contemporaries and of future generations, if he had died, as he so nearly did, in the days of his degradation, in the arms of the baker's wife, or of some hired mistress. He understood, too, that he was capable of greater things than any of these virtuous people who would then have pointed the finger of scorn at him. He had thought to demonstrate as much by his association with the Carbonari. It was not he who had failed the Carbonari, but the Carbonari who had failed him. That failure being however, through their fault and foolishness, complete, it still remained for him to

give his proofs, in a much more striking style, in Greece.

Though he had but a poor opinion of his colleagues, he was thoroughly in earnest about the cause. He had always hated bullying, and the Turks were bullies. He was always at war with hypocrites—and it seemed to him that an absolute government was an organised hypocrisy. It was not necessary, therefore, for him to love revolutionists in order to be willing to help them to work out their salvation; and he certainly did not love the Greeks. It is recorded that he gave up keeping a diary because he found so much abuse of the Greeks creeping into it; and he sometimes spoke of them with excessive bitterness: "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;" and his conduct, at the beginning of his expedition, was somewhat of a disappointment to romantic people.

The eyes of romantic Europe were upon him, and far too much was expected from the magic of his presence and his name. He would, at once, people thought, raise an army and march to Constantinople. Arriving before Constantinople, he would blow a trumpet, and the walls of the city would fall down flat. "Instead of which," they complained, he had settled down comfortably in a villa in the Ionian Islands, and was writing a fresh canto of "Don Juan." But that was not true. Byron was, indeed, living in a villa—for even a romantic poet must live somewhere; but the only poetry which he wrote in his villa was a war song. For the rest, he was wisely trying to master the situation before committing himself—refusing to stir before he saw his way.

For the situation was, just then, far from satisfactory. Their initial successes had turned the heads of the Greeks, and now their leaders were at loggerheads. Each of them was anxious to secure Byron's help, not for a nation, but for a faction, and to engage him, not in revolt against the common enemy, but in internecine strife. As Finlay puts it:

> "To nobody did the Greeks ever unmask their selfishness and self-deceit so candidly.... Kolokrotones invited him to a national assembly at Salamis. Mavrocordatos informed him that he would be of no use anywhere but at Hydra, for Mavrocordatos was then in that island. Constantine Metaxa, who was Governor of Missolonghi, wrote saying that Greece would be ruined unless Lord Byron visited that fortress. Petra Bey used plainer words. He informed Lord Byron that the true way to save Greece was to lend him, the bey, a thousand pounds."

Trelawny, who was more keen about the fighting than about the cause, accused him of "dawdling" and "shilly-shallying," and went off, without him, to join the forces of one of the sectional chiefs.[12] Byron, just because he took the revolution more seriously than Trelawny, sat tight. His immediate purpose was to reconcile the rival factions, and raise money for them. Pending the conclusion of a loan, he advanced them a good deal of his own money, and those who imagined that he was merely out to see sights and amuse himself, quickly discovered their mistake.

It was suggested to him, for instance, that as a man of letters, a scholar, and an antiquary, he might be interested to visit the stronghold of Ulysses. "Do I

look," he asked indignantly, "like one of those emasculated fogies? I detest antiquarian twaddle. Do people think I have no lucid intervals, and that I came to Greece to scribble nonsense? I will show them that I can do something better." On another occasion, when he was taken to a monastery, and the Abbot received him in ecclesiastical costume, with the swinging of odorous censers, and presented him with an address of fulsome flattery, he burst into tempestuous rage, exclaiming: "Will no one release me from the presence of these pestilential idiots? They drive me mad."

It was at this time that the idea was mooted of electing Byron to be King of Greece. A King would be wanted, it was said, as soon as the Turks had been turned out, and no one would cut a nobler figure on the throne than Byron. He heard what had been said, and smiled on the proposal. "If they make me the offer," he wrote, "I will perhaps not reject it"; and one feels quite sure that he would not have rejected it. To found a dynasty and be privileged, as a royal personage, to repudiate Lady Byron and take another wife, in order that the throne might have an heir—that would, indeed, have been a triumph over the polite Society which had cold-shouldered him and the pious people who had denounced his morals; and there can be little doubt that Byron aspired to win it, and would have won it if he had lived. He was very far, however, from stooping to conciliate the electors with smooth words; in a State Paper, addressed to the Greek Central Government, he lectured them severely:

> "I desire the well-being of Greece and nothing else. I will do all I can to secure it; but I will never consent that the English

> public be deceived as to the real state of affairs. You have fought gloriously; act honourably towards your fellow citizens and the world, and it will then no more be said, as has been repeated for two thousand years, that Philopæmen was the last of the Grecians."

The man of action spoke there; and the man of action also came out in Byron's expressions of disdain for his colleague, Colonel Stanhope—the "typographical colonel," as he called him—who maintained that the one thing needful for the salvation of the Greeks was that they should "model their institutions on those of the United States of America, and decree the unlimited freedom of the Press." Byron knew better than that. He was not to be persuaded that "newspapers would be more effectual in driving back the Ottoman armies than well-drilled troops and military tactics." He knew that fighting would be necessary, and he was awaiting his chance of fighting with effect.

His chance came when Mavrocordatos, emerging from the ruck of revolutionary leaders, arrived to raise the siege of Missolonghi, after mopping up a Turkish treasure ship by the way, and invited Byron to join him, placing a brig at his disposal for the voyage. "I need not tell you," he wrote, "to what a pitch your presence is desired by everybody, or what a prosperous direction it will give to all our affairs." The "typographical colonel," who was already with Mavrocordatos, wrote at the same time: "It is right and proper to tell you that a great deal is expected from you, both in the way of counsel and money ... you are expected with feverish anxiety. Your further delay in coming will be attended with serious

consequences." Whereupon Byron, resolving at last to take the plunge, wrote to Douglas Kinnaird, who was managing his affairs for him in London: "Get together all the means and credit of mine you can, to face the war establishment, for it is 'in for a penny, in for a pound,' and I must do all that I can for the ancients." And so, with Pietro Gamba, to the dismal swamp, where he was "welcomed," Gamba tells us, "with salvos of artillery, firing of muskets, and wild music."

> "Crowds of soldiery," Gamba continues, "and citizens of every rank, sex, and age were assembled on the shore to testify their delight. Hope and content were pictured in every countenance. His lordship landed in a Spezziot boat, dressed in a red uniform. He was in excellent health, and appeared moved by the scene."

Moved by the scene, indeed, he doubtless was. The scene was the beginning of his rehabilitation in the eyes of those who had treated him with contempt—the beginning of the proof that he had the qualities of a leader, and could wield other weapons besides the pen—the demonstrative proclamation that the path of duty was to be the way to glory. The scarlet uniform was an appropriate tribute to the solemnity of the occasion on which he formally entered upon his last and best new way of life. He did not enter upon it, however, "in excellent health," as Gamba says, but as a broken man with a shattered constitution, who had but a little time in which to do his work before the inevitable malaria came up out of the marsh and gripped him.

Meanwhile, however, Mavrocordatos gave him a

commission as commander-in-chief—archi-strategos was his grandiloquent title—and he did what he could. He took 500 of those "dark Suliotes" whom he had sung in the early cantos of "Childe Harold" into his pay, and was prepared to lead them to the storming of Lepanto. He did something to mitigate the inhumanities of the war by insisting upon the release of some Turkish prisoners whom his allies proposed to massacre. Maintaining his character as man of action, he suppressed a converted blacksmith, who arrived from England with a cargo of type, paper, bibles and Wesleyan tracts, proposing to use the tracts for cartridges and turn the type into small shot. And then, having leisure on his hands, he wrote one poem, which he showed to Colonel Stanhope, saying: "You were complaining the other day that I never write any poetry now. This is my birthday, and I have just finished something which, I think, is better than what I usually write."

I
"*'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,*
Since others it hath ceased to move;
Yet though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love!

II
"*My days are in the yellow leaf;*
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

III
"*The fire that on my bosom preys*
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze—
A funeral pile!

IV
"*The hope, the fear, the jealous care,*
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love, I cannot share,
But wear the chain.

V
"*But 'tis not* thus—*and 'tis not* here—
Such thoughts should shake my soul, nor now,
Where glory decks the hero's bier,
Or binds his brow.

VI
"*The sword, the banner, and the field,*
Glory and Greece, around me see!
The Spartan, borne upon his shield,
Was not more free.

VII
"*Awake! (not Greece—she is awake!)*
Awake my spirit! Think through whom
Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake,
And then strike home.

VIII
"*Tread those reviving passions down,*
Unworthy manhood!—unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown
Of beauty be.

IX
"*If thou regret'st thy youth*, why love?
The land of honourable death
Is here:—up to the field, and give
Away thy breath!

X

"*Seek out—less often sought than found—*
A soldier's grave, for thee the bed;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy rest."

"We perceived," Count Gamba comments, "from these lines ... that his ambition and his hope were irrevocably fixed upon the glorious objects of his expedition to Greece, and that he had made up his mind to 'return victorious or return no more.'" Readers who are better acquainted than Count Pietro alike with the English language and with the circumstances of the case will find rather more than that in them. They also reveal the memory which Byron fell back upon and lived with at the hours when he rested from the strain of his revolutionary enthusiasm. It was not the memory of Count Pietro's sister. Byron could not possibly have been thinking of her when he cried out that his love was a lonely fire at which no torch was kindled; for her love for him was far fiercer and more enduring than his love for her. His thoughts, it is quite clear, had once more strayed back to Mary Chaworth; and the internal evidence of that is confirmed by the mention of her name in two separate passages of those "Detached Thoughts" which he threw on paper just before he left Ravenna. His attachment to her, he then remembers, threw him out "on a wide, wide sea." He speaks of her as "My M.A.C.," and continues in a passage often quoted:

> "Alas! why do I say *My*? Our Union would have healed feuds, in which blood had been shed by our fathers; it would have joined lands broad and rich; it would have joined at

> least *one* heart, and two persons not ill-matched in years (she is two years my elder); and—and—and—what has been the result? She has married a man older than herself, been wretched, and separated. I have married, and am separated; and yet *we* are *not* united."

This last fact, indeed, may well have impressed him as the cruellest of all. There had been two desperately unhappy marriages, and a shivering and scattering of two sets of household gods; and yet he and she, through whatever misunderstandings and scruples, had failed to set up their new structure on the ruins. He, indeed, on his part, would have asked nothing better than to be allowed to try that task of reconstruction; but she, on hers, had been too good, or too weak, or too much under the influence of well-meaning friends who believed the whole duty of woman to consist in forgiving her husband and keeping up appearances. She had kept them up, accepting martyrdom with a resignation worthy of a better cause than any which her hard-drinking husband was capable of representing, believing that she only sacrificed herself, and earning no gratitude worth speaking of by doing so. But she had also sacrificed her lover.

He was one of those exceptional men who may do exceptional things with impunity—and also one of those self-willed men who, having made up their minds what is best, can never be contented with the second-best, but must always be kicking against the pricks. Hence the stormy emotional career through which we have followed him, and the many experiments, reckless but half-hearted, with new ways of life; a reckless but half-hearted marriage;

reckless but half-hearted intrigues, first with the Drury Lane actresses, and then with the Venetian light-o'-loves; a reckless but half-hearted career as the *cicisbeo* of an Italian nobleman's wife.

Two thoughts had been present to his mind through all these phases: the thought in the first place that he owed it to himself to prove that he was a better and a greater man than he had seemed to be, and to redeem the mess which he had made of his life by some impressive action; the thought, in the second place, of Mary Chaworth. We have seen the former thought flashing out in a letter to Moore, who was probably one of the last men in the world capable of understanding it. The latter thought is blazoned in the letter written to Mary Chaworth in the midst of the Venetian revels, and so absurdly asserted by Lord Lovelace to be a letter to Augusta Leigh. It reappears, as we have seen, in the Detached Thoughts, and also in poem after poem, from "The Dream" to the piece just cited. Evidently, therefore, it was, indeed, the thought which Byron lived with—the thought which, if not always with him, was always waiting for him when the reaction following upon excitement made room for it. There would be no escape from it until the hour when, as he put it, he looked around, and chose his ground, and took his rest; and it only remains for us to picture the last stormy scenes at the end of which rest was reached.

CHAPTER XXXII

DEATH IN A GREAT CAUSE

The end was not to come, as Byron may have hoped, on the field of battle. It was his health, as he had apprehended (though without, for that reason, taking any special care of it) that was to fail him. An imprudent plunge into the winter sea while on his way to Missolonghi had upset him; and though he had temporarily recovered, he was in no state to resist the pestilential climate of that dismal swamp. He knew it, and at the very time when Stanhope was writing home that "Lord Byron burns with military ardour and chivalry," he was keenly conscious, as his own letters show, of the danger attending his residence in the most malarious quarter of a malarious town.

> "If we are not taken off by the sword," he wrote on February 5, "we are like to march off with an ague in this mud basket; and, to conclude with a bad grace better *marshally* than *marti-ally*. The dykes of Holland, when broken down, are the deserts of Arabia in comparison with Missolonghi."

The risk, though inglorious in itself, was nevertheless the price of glory; and he paid it willingly. He was, once more, as famous as at the hour when "Childe Harold" had suddenly revealed his genius, and the fame which he now tasted was of a worthier kind. Then he had dazzled and fascinated. Now he enjoyed the love and admiration, not merely of idle women, but of a whole people, and discovered that he had the power to heal feuds and to lead men. He might,

or might not, live to wear, or to refuse, a kingly crown; but at least he had lived to be hailed as the Liberator of a nation, and to be revered accordingly. An anecdote preserved by Parry, the artificer who was serving under him in charge of the arsenal, illustrates the adoration of the peasantry:

> "Byron one day," Parry relates, "returned from his ride more than usually pleased. An interesting country-woman, with a fine family, had come out of her cottage and presented him with a curd cheese and some honey, and could not be persuaded to accept payment for it. 'I have felt,' he said, 'more pleasure this day, and at this circumstance, than for a long time past.'"

Such was the homage paid to him, by the humble as well as the great; but it soon became increasingly evident that though he had achieved the glory, death was to rob him of the crown. He began to have epileptic seizures; and in the midst of them, there was trouble with the Suliotes. There were only five hundred of them, and they preferred the insolent claim that one hundred and fifty of them should be promoted to be officers, and that the rest should be accorded a month's pay in advance. Colonel Stanhope tells us how he quelled the mutiny:

> "Soon after his dreadful paroxysm, when he was lying on his sick-bed, while his whole nervous system completely shaken, the mutinous Suliotes, covered with dirt and splendid attire, broke into his apartment, brandishing their costly arms, and loudly demanding their rights. Lord Byron electrified by this unexpected act, seemed to

> recover from his sickness, and the more the Suliotes raged, the more his calm courage triumphed. The scene was truly sublime."

The mutineers suppressed, the doctors came and bled him. He pulled through, whether in consequence of their treatment or in spite of it; but his regimen and his mode of life were not such as to restore him to vigour. He was sweeping away the coats of his stomach by large and frequent doses of powerful purgative medicaments; and in the intervals between the purges he partook freely of a comfortable and potent kind of punch which Parry mixed for him. It is no wonder, therefore, that relapse succeeded relapse and that just at that hour at which fortune seemed beginning to smile upon the Greeks, his life could be seen to be ebbing away.

On April 9, while riding with Gamba, he was caught in a violent storm of rain. "I should make a fine soldier if I did not know how to stand such a trifle as this," he said to his companion; but two hours after his return he was shivering and complaining: "I am in great pain," he said to Gamba. "I should not care for dying but I cannot bear these pains." On April 11, he was well enough to ride again, but on the 12th, he was in bed with what was diagnosed as rheumatic fever, and the fever never again left him. The inevitable proposal to bleed him was repeated. At first he resisted, with the usual talk about the lancet being more deadly than the sword, but in the end he acquiesced. "There!" he said. "You are, I see, a d——d set of butchers. Take away as much blood as you like, and have done with it."

They took twenty ounces of blood from him. It was an absurd treatment, and probably hastened the end;

but he had bad doctors, and even the good doctors of these days knew no better. Moreover his constitution was shattered. He was falling to pieces like an old ruin, and it is doubtful whether the wisest treatment could have saved him. There was a further rally, however, and Gamba, who was laid up in an adjoining apartment with a sprained ankle, hobbled in to see him. “I contrived,” he writes, “to walk to his room. His look alarmed me much. He was too calm. He talked to me in the kindest way, but in a sepulchral tone. I could not bear it. A flood of tears burst from me, and I was obliged to retire.”

Soon after this, the final delirium set in. His attendants stood by his bedside weeping copiously. They could not, says Cordy Jeaffreson cynically, have wept more copiously “if there had been a prize of a thousand guineas for the one who wept most.” Afterwards he was alone, at one time with Parry, and at another time with Fletcher; and of his last articulate words there is more than one account. It is told that he spoke of Greece: “I have given her my time, my money, and my health—what could I do more? Now I give her my life.” It is told that he gesticulated wildly, as if mounting a breach to an assault, and calling, half in English, half in Italian: “Forward—forward—courage—follow my example—don’t be afraid.” It is told again that he stammered unintelligible messages to Lady Byron and to his sister.

But all that matters little. What matters is, not Byron’s last utterance, but his last action, now that neither love nor lust, nor despair, nor bitterness, nor sloth, nor self-indulgence, held him any longer in unworthy bondage. For he had died in the act of redeeming the many wasted years, and of fulfilling

the prediction of his most degraded time, that, in spite of everything, he would come to achievement at last—not merely the literary achievement which was compatible with the life of a trifler and a man of pleasure, but the more glorious achievement which is only possible to those who consent to sacrifice their ease and make a free gift of their energies to a cause which they perceive to be greater than themselves.

APPENDIX

BYRON'S LETTER TO MARY CHAWORTH

VENICE, *May 17, 1819*

MY DEAREST LOVE,

I have been negligent in not writing, but what can I say? Three years' absence—and the total change of scene and habit make such a difference that we have never nothing in common but our affections and our relationship. But I have never ceased nor can cease to feel for a moment that perfect and boundless attachment which bound and binds me to you—which renders me incapable of *real* love for any other human being—for what could they be to me after *you*? My own ... we may have been very wrong—but I repent of nothing except that cursed marriage—and

your refusing to continue to love me as you had loved me. I can neither forget nor *quite forgive* you for that precious piece of reformation, but I can never be other than I have been—and whenever I love anything it is because it reminds me in some way or other of yourself. For instance, I not long ago attached myself to a Venetian for no earthly reason (although a pretty woman) but because she was called ..., and she often remarked (without knowing the reason) how fond I was of the name. It is heart-breaking to think of our long separation—and I am sure more than punishment enough for all our sins. Dante is more humane in his "Hell," for he places his unfortunate lovers—Francesca of Rimini and Paolo—whose case fell a good deal short of *ours* (though sufficiently naughty) in company; and though they suffer, it is at least together. If ever I return to England it will be to see you; and recollect that in all time, and place, and feelings, I have never ceased to be the same to you in heart. Circumstances may have ruffled my manner and hardened my spirit; you may have seen me harsh and exasperated with all things around me; grieved and tortured with your *new resolution*, and soon after the persecution of that infamous fiend who drove me from my country, and conspired against my life—by endeavouring to deprive me of all that could render it precious—but remember that even then *you* were the sole object that cost me a tear; and *what tears*! Do you remember our parting? I have not spirits now to write to you upon other subjects. I am well in health, and have no cause of grief but the reflection that we are not together. When you write to me speak to me of yourself, and say that you love me; never mind commonplace people and topics which can be in no degree interesting to me who see nothing in England

but the country which holds *you*, or around it but the sea which divides us. They say absence destroys weak passions, and confirms strong ones. Alas! *mine* for you is the union of all passions and of all affections—has strengthened itself, but will destroy me; I do not speak of physical destruction, for I have endured, and can endure, much; but the annihilation of all thoughts, feelings, or hopes, which have not more or less a reference to you and to *our recollections*.

Ever, dearest,

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TAVISTOCK STREET COVENT GARDEN
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Footnotes:

[1] One of the heads of the family was born before his father's marriage, but he was subsequently given a title on his own merits.

[2] In Mr. Murray's latest edition of "The Letters and Journals."

[3] He would have preferred Oxford, but there was no set of rooms vacant at Christ Church.

[4] They intoned underneath his windows the supplication: Good Lort, deliver us!

[5] Musters took his wife's name when he married her, though he afterwards resumed his own.

[6] In "Byron: the Last Phase."

[7] Afterwards the Rev. William Harness, and a popular preacher.

[8] Sir Ralph Milbanke had taken the name of Noel on succeeding to some property.

[9] For the full text of the letter see Appendix.

[10] It is doubtful whether Shelley was at Marlow at this date, so that Miss Clairmont's memory of the place of meeting was probably at fault.

[11] Southey, among others, circulated the scandal.

[12] Odysseus, who was in Attica.

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