HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

BOOK IV.

MODERN LIFE.

CHAPTER II.

Lord Byron.

I

I have reserved for the last the greatest and most English of these literary men; he is so great and so English that from him alone we shall learn more truths of his country and of his age than from all the rest put together. His ideas were proscribed during his life; it has been attempted to depreciate his genius since his death. Even at the present day English critics are hardly just to him. He fought all his life against the society from which he was descended; and during his life, as after his death, he suffered the penalty of the resentment which he provoked, and the dislike to which he gave rise. A foreign critic may be more impartial, and freely praise the powerful hand whose blows he has not felt.

If ever there was a violent and madly sensitive soul, but incapable of shaking off its bonds; ever agitated.

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but yet shut in; predisposed to poetry by its innate fire, but limited by its natural barriers to a single kind of poetry,—it was Byron’s.

This promptitude to extreme emotions was with him a family legacy, and the result of education. His great-uncle, a sort of raving and misanthropical maniac, had slain in a tavern brawl, by candle-light, Mr. Chaworth, his relative; and had been tried before the House of Lords. His father, a brutal roysterer, had eloped with the wife of Lord Carmarthen, ruined and ill-treated Miss Gordon, his second wife; and, after living like a madman and a scoundrel, had gone with the remains of his wife’s family property, to die abroad. His mother, in her moments of fury, would tear her dresses and her bonnets to pieces. When her wretched husband died she almost lost her reason, and her cries were heard in the street. It would take a long story to tell what a childhood Byron passed under the care of “this lioness;” in what torrents of insults, interspersed with softer moods, he himself lived, just as passionate and more bitter. His mother ran after him, called him a “lame brat,” shouted at him, and threw fire-shovel and tongs at his head. He held his tongue, bowed, and none the less felt the outrage. One day, when he was “in one of his silent rages,” they had to take out of his hand a knife which he had taken from the table, and which he was already raising to his throat. Another time the quarrel was so terrible, that son and mother, each privately, went to “the apothecary’s, inquiring anxiously whether the other had been to purchase poison, and cautioning the vendor of drugs not to attend to such an application, if made.”

1 Byron’s Works, ed. Moore, 17 vols. 1882; Life, i. 102.
friendships were passions." Many years after he left Harrow, he never heard the name of Lord Clare, one of his old schoolfellows, pronounced, without "a beating of the heart." A score of times he got himself into trouble for his friends, offering them his time, his pen, his purse. One day, at Harrow, a big boy claimed the right to fag his friend, little Peel, and finding him refractory, gave him a beating on the inner fleshy side of his arm, which he had twisted round to render the pain more acute. Byron, too small to fight the rascal, came up to him, "blushing with rage," tears in his eyes, and asked with a trembling voice how many stripes he meant to inflict. "Why," returned the executioner, "you little rascal, what is that to you?" "Because, if you please," said Byron, holding out his arm, "I would take half." He never met with objects of distress without affording them succour. In his latter days in Italy, he gave away a thousand pounds out of every four thousand he spent. The upwellings of this heart were too copious, and flooded forth good and evil impetuously, and at the least collision. Like Dante, in his early youth, Byron, at the age of eight, fell in love with a child named Mary Duff.

"How very odd that I should have been so utterly, devotedly fond of that girl, at an age when I could neither feel passion, nor know the meaning of the word! . . . I recollect all our caresses, . . . my restlessness, my sleeplessness. My misery, my love for that girl were so violent, that I sometimes doubt if I have ever been really attached since. When I heard of her being married, . . . it nearly threw me into convulsions."

At twelve years he fell in love with his cousin, Margaret Parker:

1 Byron's Works, Life, i. 63.  
2 Ibid. i. 69.  
3 Ibid. 187.  
4 Ibid. i. 26.
"My passion had its usual effects upon me. I could not sleep—I could not eat—I could not rest; and although I had reason to know that she loved me, it was the texture of my life to think of the time which must elapse before we could meet again, being usually about twelve hours of separation. But I was a fool then, and am not much wiser now."  

He never was wiser, read hard at school; took too much exercise; later on, at Cambridge, Newstead, and London, he changed night into day, rushed into debauchery, kept long fasts, led an unwholesome way of living, and engaged in the extreme of every taste and every excess. As he was a dandy, and one of the most brilliant, he nearly let himself die of hunger for fear of becoming fat, then drank and ate greedily during his nights of recklessness. Moore said:

"Lord Byron, for the last two days, had done nothing towards sustenance beyond eating a few biscuits and (to appease appetite) chewing mastic. . . . He confined himself to lobsters, and of these finished two or three to his own share,—interposing, sometimes, a small liqueur-glass of strong white brandy, sometimes a tumbler of very hot water, and then pure brandy again, to the amount of near half a dozen small glasses of the latter. . . . After this we had claret, of which having despatched two bottles between us, at about four o'clock in the morning we parted."

Another day we find in Byron's journal the following words:

"Yesterday, dined tilte-a-tilte at the "Cocoa" with Scrope Davies—sat from six till midnight—drank between us one bottle of champagne and six of claret, neither of which wines ever affect me."

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1 Byron's Works, Life, i. 53.  
2 Ibid. iii. 88.  
3 Ibid. iii. 20, March 28, 1814.
Later, at Venice:

"I have hardly had a wink of sleep this week past. I have had some curious masking adventures this carnival. . . . I will work the mine of my youth to the last vein of the ore, and then—good night. I have lived, and am content." 

At this rate the organs wear out, and intervals of temperance are not sufficient to repair them. The stomach does not continue to act, the nerves get out of order, and the soul undermines the body, and the body the soul.

"I always wake in actual despair and despondency, in all respects, even of that which pleased me over-night. In England, five years ago, I had the same kind of hypochondria, but accompanied with so violent a thirst that I have drank as many as fifteen bottles of soda-water in one night after going to bed, and been still thirsty, . . . striking off the necks of bottles from mere thirsty impatience." 

Much less is necessary to ruin mind and body wholly. Thus these vehement minds live, ever driven and broken by their own energy, like a cannon ball, which, when fired, turns and spins round quickly, but at the smallest obstacle leaps up, rebounds, destroys everything, and ends by burying itself in the earth. Beyle, a most shrewd observer, who lived with Byron for several weeks, says that on certain days he was mad; at other times, in presence of beautiful things, he became sublime. Though reserved and proud, music made him weep. The rest of his time, petty English passions, pride of rank, for instance, a vain dandyism, unhinged him: he spoke of Brummel with a shudder of jealousy and

1 Byron's Works, Life, iv. 81; Letter to Moore, Feb. 12, 1818.

2 Ibid. v. 96, Feb. 2, 1821.
admiration. But small or great, the passion of the hour swept down upon his mind like a tempest, roused him, transported him either into imprudence or genius. Byron's own Journal, his familiar letters, all his unstudied prose, is, as it were, trembling with wit, anger, enthusiasm; the smallest words breathe sensitiveness; since Saint Simon we have not seen more lifelike confidences. All styles appear dull, and all souls sluggish by the side of his.

In this splendid rush of unbridled and disbanded faculties, which leaped up at random, and seemed to drive him without option to the four quarters of the globe, one took the reins, and cast him on the wall against which he was broken.

"Sir Walter Scott describes Lord Byron as being a man of real goodness of heart, and the kindest and best feelings, miserably thrown away by his foolish contempt of public opinion. Instead of being warned or checked by public opposition, it roused him to go on in a worse strain, as if he said, 'Ay, you don't like it; well, you shall have something worse for your pains.'"  

This rebellious instinct is inherent in the race; there was a whole cluster of wild passions, born of the climate, which nourished him: a gloomy humour, violent imagination, indomitable pride, a relish for danger, a craving for strife, that inner exaltation, only satiated by destruction, and that sombre madness which

1 Lockhart's Life of Sir Walter Scott, vii. 323.
2 "If I was born, as the nurses say, with a 'silver spoon in my mouth,' it has stuck in my throat, and spoiled my palate, so that nothing put into it is swallowed with much relish,—unless it be cayenne. . . . I see no such horror in a dreamless sleep, and I have no conception of any existence which duration would not make tiresome."
urged forward the Scandinavian Berserkirs, when, in an open bark, beneath a sky cloven with lightning, they abandoned themselves to the tempest, whose fury they had breathed. This instinct is in the blood: people are born so, as they are born lions or bull-dogs.\(^1\) Byron was still a little boy in petticoats when his nurse scolded him roughly for having soiled or torn a new frock which he had just put on. He got into one of his silent rages, seized the garment with his hands, rent it from top to bottom, and stood erect, motionless, and gloomy before the storming nurse, so as to set more effectually her wrath at defiance. His pride mastered him. When at ten he inherited the title of lord, and his name was first called at school, preceded by the title *dominus*, he could not answer the customary *adsum*, stood silent amidst the general stare of his school-fellows, and at last burst into tears. Another time, at Harrow, in a dispute which was dividing the school, a boy said, "Byron won't join us, for he never likes to be second anywhere." He was offered the command, and then only would he condescend to take part with them. Never to submit to a master; to rise with his whole soul against every semblance of encroachment or rule; to keep his person intact and inviolate at all cost, and to the end against all; to dare everything rather than give any sign of submission,—such was his character. This is why he was disposed to undergo anything rather than give signs of weakness. At ten he was a stoic from pride. His foot was painfully stretched in a wooden contrivance whilst he was taking\

\(^1\) "I like Junius: he was a good hater.—I don't understand yielding sensitiveness. What I feel is an immense rage for forty-eightطورا."
his Latin lesson, and his master pitied him, saying "he must be suffering." "Never mind, Mr. Rogers," he said, "you shall not see any signs of it in me." Such as he was as a child, he continued as a man. In mind and body he strove, or prepared himself for strife. Every day, for hours at a time, he boxed, fired pistols, practised sword-exercise, ran and leaped, rode, overcame obstacles. These were the exploits of his hands and muscles; but he needed others. For lack of enemies he found fault with society, and made war upon it. We know to what excesses the dominant opinions then ran. England was at the height of the war with France, and thought it was fighting for morality and liberty. In English eyes, at this time, Church and State were holy things: any one who touched them became a public enemy. In this fit of national passion and Protestant severity, whosoever publicly avowed liberal ideas and manners seemed an incendiary, and stirred up against himself the instincts of property, the doctrines of moralists, the interests of politicians, and the prejudices of the people. Byron chose this moment to praise Voltaire and Rousseau, to admire Napoleon, to avow himself a sceptic, to plead for nature and pleasure against cant and regularity, to say that high English society, debauched and hypocritical, made phrases and killed men, to preserve its sinecures and rotten boroughs. As though political hatred was not enough, he contracted, in addition, literary animosities, attacked the whole body of critics, ran down the new poetry, declared that the most celebrated were "Claudi-ans," men of the later empire, raged against the Lake

1 Byron's Works, Life, i 41.
2 In English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.
school, and in consequence had in Southey a bitter and unwearied enemy. Thus provided with enemies, he laid himself open to attack on all sides. He decried himself through his hatred of cant, his bravado, his boasting about his vices. He depicted himself in his heroes, but for the worse; in such a way that no man could fail to recognise him, and think him much worse than he was. Walter Scott wrote, immediately after seeing *Childe Harold*:

"*Childe Harold* is, I think, a very clever poem, but gives no good symptom of the writer's heart or morals... Vice ought to be a little more modest, and it must require impudence almost equal to the noble Lord's other powers, to claim sympathy gravely for the ennui arising from his being tired of his wassailers and his paramours. There is a monstrous deal of conceit in it, too, for it is informing the inferior part of the world that their little old-fashioned scruples of limitation are not worthy of his regard."  

"My noble friend is something like my old peacock, who chooses to bivouac apart from his lady, and sit below my bedroom window, to keep me awake with his screeching lamentation. Only, I own he is not equal in melody to Lord Byron."  

Such were the sentiments which he called forth in all respectable classes. He was pleased thereat, and did worse—giving out that in his adventures in the East he had dared a good many things; and he was not indignant when identified with his heroes. He said he should like to feel for once the sensations of a man who had committed a murder. Another time he wrote in his Diary:

1. Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, iii 389  
“Hobhouse told me an odd report,—that I am the actual Conrad, the veritable Corsair, and that part of my travels are supposed to have passed in piracy. Um! people sometimes hit near the truth, but never the whole truth. He don’t know what I was about the year after he left the Levant; nor does any one—nor—nor—nor—however, it is a lie—‘but I doubt the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth.’”

These dangerous words were turned against him like a dagger; but he loved danger, mortal danger, and was only at ease when he saw the points of all angers bristling against him. Alone against all, against an armed society; erect, invincible, even against common sense, even against conscience,—it was then he felt in all his strained nerves the great and terrible sensation, to which his whole being involuntarily inclined.

A last imprudence brought down the attack. As long as he was an unmarried man, his excesses might be excused by the over-strong passions of a temperament which often causes youth in England to revolt against good taste and rule; but marriage settles them, and it was marriage which in him completed his unsettling. He found that his wife was a kind of paragon of virtue, known as such, “a creature of rule,” correct and without feelings, incapable of committing a fault herself, and of forgiving. His servant Fletcher observed, “It is very odd, but I never yet knew a lady that could not manage my Lord except my Lady.”

Lady Byron thought her husband mad, and had him examined by physicians. Having learned that he was in his right mind, she left him, returned to her

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1 Moore’s Life of Byron, iii. 12, March 10, Thor’s day. The last part of the sentence is a quotation from Macbeth, v. 5.
2 Ibid. iv. 169, note.
father, and refused ever to see him again. Thereupon he passed for a monster. The papers covered him with obloquy; his friends induced him not to go to a theatre or to Parliament, fearing that he would be hooted or insulted. The rage and pangs which so violent a soul, precociously accustomed to brilliant glory felt in this universal storm of outrage, can only be learned from his verses. He grew stubborn, went to Venice, and steeped himself in the voluptuous Italian life, even in low debauchery, the better to insult the Puritan prudery which had condemned him, and left it only through an offence still more blamed, his public intimacy with the young Countess Guiccioli. Meanwhile he showed himself as bitterly republican in politics as in morality. He wrote in 1813: "I have simplified my politics into an utter detestation of all existing governments." This time, at Ravenna, his house was the centre and storehouse of conspirators, and he generously and imprudently prepared to take arms with them, to strike for the deliverance of Italy:

"They mean to insurrect here, and are to honour me with a call thereupon. I shall not fall back; though I don’t think them in force and heart sufficient to make much of it. But, onward. . . What signifies self? . . . It is not one man nor a million, but the spirit of liberty which must be spread. . . . The mere selfish calculation ought never to be made on such occasions; and, at present, it shall not be computed by me. . . . I should almost regret that my own affairs went well, when those of nations are in peril."  

In the meantime he had quarrels with the police: his house was watched, he was threatened with assassina-

1 Moore, Byron’s Works; Life, v. 67, Jan. 9. 1821.
tion, and yet he rode out daily, and went into the
neighbouring pine-forest to practice pistol-shooting.
These are the sentiments of a man standing at the
muzzle of a loaded cannon, waiting for it to go off.
The emotion is great, nay, heroic, but it is not agree-
able; and certainly, even at this season of great emo-
tion, he was unhappy. Nothing is more likely to
poison happiness than a combative spirit. He writes:

"What is the reason that I have been, all my lifetime, more
or less ennuyé? ... I do not know how to answer this,
but presume that it is constitutional,—as well as the waking
in low spirits, which I have invariably done for many years.
Temperance and exercise, which I have practise at times, and
for a long time together vigorously and violently, made little
or no difference. Violent passions did: when under their
immediate influence—it is odd, but—I was in agitated, but
not in depressed spirits. . . . Wine and spirits make me sullen
and savage to ferocity—silent, however, and retiring, and not
quarrelsome, if not spoken to. Swimming also raises my
spirits; but in general they are low, and get daily lower. That
is hopeless; for I do not think I am so much ennuyé as I was at
nineteen. The proof is, that then I must game, or drink, or
be in motion of some kind, or I was miserable." ¹

"What I feel most growing upon me are laziness, and a
disrelish more powerful than indifference. If I rouse, it is into
fury. I presume that I shall end (if not earlier by accident,
or some such termination) like Swift, "dying at top." ² Lega
(his servant) came in with a lettre about a bill unpaid at Venice
which I thought paid months ago. I flew into a paroxysm of
rage, which almost made me faint. I have always had une âme,
which not only tormented itself, but everybody else in contact
with it, and an esprit violent, which has almost left me without
any esprit at all." ³

¹ Moore—Byron's Works; Life, v. 60. Jan. 6, 1821.
² Ibid. v. 97, Feb. 2, 1821. ³ Ibid. 96.
A horrible foreboding, which haunted him to the end! On his deathbed, in Greece, he refused, I know not why, to be bled, and preferred to die at once. They threatened that the uncontrolled disease might end in madness. He sprang up: "There! you are, I see, a d—d set of butchers! Take away as much blood as you like, but have done with it,"¹ and stretched out his arm. Amidst such wild outbursts and anxieties he passed his life. Anguish endured, danger braved, resistance overcome, grief relished, all the greatness and sadness of the black warlike madness,—such are the images which he needs must let pass before him. In default of action he had dreams, and he only betook himself to dreams for want of action. He said, when embarking for Greece, that he had taken poetry for lack of better, and that it was not his fit work. "What is a poet? what is he worth? what does he do? He is a babbler." He augured ill of the poetry of his age, even of his own; saying that, if he lived ten years more, they should see something else from him than verses. In "reality, he would have been more at home as a sea-king, or a captain of a band of troopers during the Middle-ages. Except two or three gleams of Italian sunshine, his poetry and life, are those of a Scald transplanted into modern life, who in this over-well regulated world did not find his vocation.

II.

Byron was a poet, but in his own way—a strange way, like that in which he lived. There were internal tempests within him, avalanches of ideas, which found issue only in writing. He wrote: "I have

¹ Moore, Byron's Works; Life, vi. 206.
written from the fulness of my mind, from passion, from impulse, from many motives, but not 'for their sweet voices.' To withdraw myself from myself has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all—and publishing also the continuance of the same object, by the action it affords to the mind, which else recoils upon itself.” He wrote almost always with astonishing rapidity, *The Corsair*, in ten days, *The Bride of Abydos* in four days. While it was printing he added and corrected, but without recasting: “I told you before that I can never recast anything. I am like the tiger. If I miss the first spring, I go grumbling back to my jungle again; but if I do it, it is crushing.”

Doubtless he sprang, but he had a chain: never, in the freest flight of his thoughts, did he liberate himself from himself. He dreams of himself, and sees himself throughout. It is a boiling torrent, but hedged in with rocks. No such great poet has had so narrow an imagination; he could not metamorphose himself into another. They are his own sorrows, his own revolts, his own travels, which, hardly transformed and modified, he introduces into his verses. He does not invent, he observes; he does not create, he transcribes. His copy is darkly exaggerated, but it is a copy. “I could not write upon anything,” says he, “without some personal experience and foundation.” We will find in his letters and note-books, almost feature for feature, the most striking of his descriptions. The capture of Ismail, the shipwreck of Don Juan, are, almost word for word, like two accounts of it in prose. If none but cockneys could attribute to him the crimes of his heroes, none but blind men could fail to see in him the sentiments of his

—*Moore, Byron’s Works; Lige, v. 33. Ravenna; Nov. 18, 1820.*
characters. This is so true, that he has not created more than one. Child Harold, Lara, the Giaour, the Corsair, Manfred, Sardanapalus, Cain, Tasso, Dante, and the rest, are always the same—one man represented under various costumes, in several lands, with different expressions; but just as painters do, when, by change of garments, decorations, and attitudes, they draw fifty portraits from the same model. He meditated too much upon himself to be enamoured of anything else. The habitual sternness of his will prevented his mind from being flexible; his force, always concentrated for effort and bent upon strife, shut him up in self-contemplation, and reduced him never to make a poem, save of his own heart.

What style would he adopt? With these concentrated and tragic sentiments he had a classical mind. By the strangest mixture, the books, which he preferred, were at once the most violent or the most proper, the Bible above all: "I am a great reader and admirer of those books (the Bible), and had read them through and through before I was eight years old; that is to say, the Old Testament, for the New struck me as a task, but the other as a pleasure." Observe this word: he did not relish the tender and self-denying mysticism of the gospel, but the cruel sternness and lyrical outcries of the old Hebrews. Next to the Bible he loved Pope, the most correct and formal of men:

"As to Pope, I have always regarded him as the greatest name in our poetry. Depend upon it, the rest are barbarians. He is a Greek Temple, with a Gothic Cathedral on one hand, and a Turkish Mosque and all sorts of fantastic pagodas and conventicles about him. You may call Shakespeare and Milton
pyramids, but I prefer the Temple of Theseus or the Parthenon to a mountain of burnt brickwork. . . . The grand distinction of the underforms of the new school of poets is their vulgarity. By this I do not mean they are coarse, but shabby-genteel.\textsuperscript{1}

And he presently wrote two letters with incomparable vivacity and spirit, to defend Pope against the scorn of modern writers. These writers, according to him, have spoiled the public taste. The only ones who were worth anything—Crabbe, Campbell, Rogers—imitate the style of Pope. A few others had talent; but, take them all together, those who had come last had perverted literature; they did not know their own language; their expressions are only approximate, above or below the true tone, forced or dull. He ranges himself amongst the corrupters,\textsuperscript{2} and we soon see that this theory is not an invention, springing from bad temper and polemics; he returns to it. In his two first attempts—Hours of Idleness, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers—he tried to follow it up. Later, and in almost all his works, we find its effect. He recommends and practises the rule of unity in tragedy. He loves oratorical form, symmetrical phrase, condensed style. He likes to plead his passions. Sheridan tried to induce Byron to devote himself to eloquence; and the vigour, piercing logic, wonderful vivacity, close argument of his prose, prove that he would have taken the first rank amongst pamphleteers.\textsuperscript{3} If he attains to it amongst the poets it is partly due to his classical system. This oratorical

\textsuperscript{1} Moore, Byron's Works; Life, v. 150, Ravenna, May 8, 1821.

\textsuperscript{2} "All the styles of the day are bombastic. I don't except my own; no one has done more through negligence to corrupt the language."

\textsuperscript{3} See his English Bards and Scotch Reviewers
form, in which Pope compresses his thought like La Bruyère, magnifies the force and swing of vehement ideas; like a narrow and straight canal, it collects and dashes them in their right direction; there is then nothing which their impetus does not carry away; and it is thus Lord Byron from the first, in the face of hostile criticisms, and over jealous reputations, has made his way to the public.¹

Thus Childe Harold made its way. At the first onset every man who read it was agitated. It was more than an author who spoke; it was a man. In spite of his denial, the author was identified with his hero: he calumniated himself, but still it was himself whom he portrayed. He was recognised in that young voluptuous and disgusted man, ready to weep amidst his orgies, who

"Sore sick at heart,
And from his fellow bacchanals would flee;
'Tis said, at times the sullen tear would start,
But Pride congeal'd the drop within his ee:
Apart he stalk'd in joyless reverie,
And from his native land resolved to go,
And visit scorching climes beyond the sea;
With pleasure drugg'd, he almost long'd for woe."²

Fleeing from his native land, he carried, amongst the splendours and cheerfulness of the south, his unwearying persecutor, "demon thought," implacable behind him. The scenery was recognised: it had been copied on the spot. And what was the whole book but a diary of travel? He said in it what he had seen and thought. What poetic fiction is so valuable as genuine sensation?

¹ Thirty thousand copies of the Corsair were sold in one day.
² Byron's Works, viii.; Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, c. 1. 6.
What is more penetrating than confidence, voluntary or involuntary? Truly, every word here expressed an emotion of eye or heart:

"The tender azure of the unruffled deep.
The mountain-moss by scorching skies imbrownd' d.
The orange tints that gild the greenest bough." 

All these beauties, calm or imposing, he had enjoyed, and sometimes suffered through them; and hence we see them through his verse. Whatever he touched, he made palpitate and live; because, when he saw it, his heart had beaten and he had lived. He himself, a little later, quitting the mask of Harold, took up the parable in his own name; and who is not touched by an avowal so passionate and complete?

"Yet must I think less wildly:—I have thought
Too long and darkly, till my brain became,
In its own eddy boiling and o'erwrought,
A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame!
And thus, untaught in youth my heart to tame,
My springs of life were poison'd. 'Tis too late!
Yet am I changed; though still enough the same
In strength to bear what time can not abate,
And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate. . . .

But soon he knew himself the most unfit
Of men to herd with Man; with whom he held
Little in common; untaught to submit
His thoughts to others, though his soul was quell'd
In youth by his own thoughts; still uncompell'd,
He would not yield dominion of his mind
To spirits against whom his own rebell'd;

-Proud though in desolation, which could find,
A life within itself, to breathe without mankind. . . .

* Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, c. i. 19.
Like the Chaldean, he could watch the stars,
Till he had peopled them with beings bright
As their own beams; and earth, and earth-born jars,
And human frailties, were forgotten quite:
Could he have kept his spirit to that flight
He had been happy; but this clay will sink
Its spark immortal, envying it the light
To which it mounts, as if to break the link
That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink.

But in Man’s dwellings he became a thing
Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome,
Droop’d as a wild-born falcon with clipt wing,
To whom the boundless air alone were home:
Then came his fit again, which to o’ercome,
As eagerly the barr’d-up bird will beat
His breast and beak against his wiry dome
Till the blood tinge his plumage, so the heat
Of his impeded soul would through his bosom eat.”¹

Such are the sentiments wherewith he surveyed
nature and history, not to comprehend them and forget
himself before them, but to seek in them and impress
upon them the image of his own passions. He does
not leave objects to speak of themselves, but forces
them to answer him. Amidst their peace, he is only
occupied by his own emotion. He attunes them to
his soul, and compels them to repeat his own cries.
All is inflated here, as in himself; the vast strophe
rolls along, carrying in its overflowing bed the flood of
vehement ideas; declamation unfolds itself, pompous,
and at times artificial (it was his first work), but
potent, and so often sublime that the rhetorical rub-
bish, which he yet preserved, disappeared under the

¹ Child’s Harold’s Pilgrimage, c. iii. 7–15.
afflux of splendours, with which it is loaded. Wordsworth, Walter Scott, by the side of this prodigality of accumulated splendours, seemed poor and dull; never since Æschylus was seen such a tragic pomp, and men followed with a sort of pang, the train of gigantic figures, whom he brought in mournful ranks before their eyes, from the far past:

"I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;  
A palace and a prison on each hand;  
I saw from out the wave her structures rise  
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand:  
A thousand years, their cloudy wings expand  
Around me, and a dying Glory smiles  
O'er the far times, when many a subject land  
Look'd to the winged Lion's marble piles,  
Where Venice sate in state, throned on her hundred isles!

Shelooks a sea Cybele, fresh from ocean,  
Rising with her tiara of proud towers  
At airy distance, with majestic motion,  
A ruler of the waters and their powers:  
And such she was!—her daughters had their dowers  
From spoils of nations, and the exhaustless East  
Pour'd in her lap all gems in sparkling showers.  
In purple was she robed, and of her feast  
Monarchs partook, and deem'd their dignity increased...\1

Lo! where the Giant on the mountain stands,  
His blood-red tresses deep'ning in the sun,  
With death-shot glowing in his fiery hands,  
And eye that scorches all it glares upon;  
Restless it rolls, now fix'd and now anon  
Flashing afar,—and at his iron feet  
Destruction cowers, to mark what deeds are done;

1 Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, c. iv. 1 and 2.
For on this morn three potent nations meet,
To shed before his shrine the blood he deems most sweet.

By Heaven! it is a splendid sight to see
(For one who hath no friend, no brother there)
Their rival scarfs of mix’d embroidery,
Their various arms that glitter in the air!
What gallant war-hounds rouse them from their lair,
And guash their fangs, loud yelling for the prey!
All join the chase, but few the triumph share;
The Grave shall bear the chiefeast prize away,
And Havoc scarce for joy can number their array. . . .

What from this barren being do we reap?
Our senses narrow, and our reason frail,
Life short, and truth a gem which loves the deep,
And all things weigh’d in custom’s falsest scale,
Opinion an omnipotence, whose veil
Mantles the earth with darkness, until right
And wrong are accidents, and men grow pale
Lest their own judgments should become too bright,
And their free thoughts be crimes, and earth have too much light.

And thus they plod in sluggish misery,
Rotting from sire to son, and age to age,
Proud of their trampled nature, and so die,
Bequeathing their hereditary rage
To the new race of inborn slaves, who wage
War for their chains, and rather than be free,
Bleed gladiator-like and still engage
Within the same arena where they see
Their fellows fall before, like leaves of the same tree.”

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1 Child's Harold's Pilgrimage, c. i. 39 and 40.
2 Ibid. c. iv. 93 and 94.
Has ever style better expressed a soul? It is seen here labouring and expanding. Long and stormily the ideas boiled within this soul like bars of metal heaped in the furnace. They melted there before the strain of the intense heat; they mingled therein their heated mass amidst convulsions and explosions, and then at last the door is opened; a slow stream of fire descends into the trough prepared beforehand, heating the circumambient air, and its glittering hues scorch the eyes which persist in looking upon it.

III.

Description and monologue did not suffice Byron; and he needed, to express his ideal, events and actions. Only events try the force and elasticity of the soul; only actions display and regulate this force and elasticity. Amidst events he sought for the most powerful, amidst actions the strongest; and we see appear successively The Bride of Abydos, The Giaour, The Corsair, Lara, Parisina, The Siege of Corinth, Mazeppa, and The Prisoner of Chillon.

I know that these sparkling poems have grown dull in forty years. In their necklace of Oriental pearls have been discovered beads of glass; and Byron, who only half loved them, judged better than his judges. Yet he judged amiss; those which he preferred are the most false. His Corsair is marred by classic elegancies: the pirates' song at the beginning is no truer than a chorus at the Italian Opera; his scamps propound philosophical antitheses as balanced as those of Pope. A hundred times ambition, glory, envy, despair, and the other abstract personages, whose images in the time of the first Empire the French used
to set upon their drawing-room clocks, break in amidst living passions. 1 The noblest passages are disfigured by pedantic apostrophes, and the pretentious poetic diction sets up its threadbare frippery and conventional ornaments. 2 Far worse, he studies effect and follows the fashion. Melodramatic strings pull his characters at the right time, so as to obtain the grimace which shall make his public shudder:

"Who thundering comes on blackest steed,
With slacken'd bit and hoof of speed!

... Approach, thou craven crouching slave,
Say, is not this Thermopylae?"

Wretched mannerisms, emphatic and vulgar, imitated from Lucan and our modern Lucans, but which produce their effect only on a first perusal, and on the common herd of readers. There is an infallible means of attracting a mob, which is, to shout out loud; with shipwrecks, sieges, murders, and combats, we shall always interest them; show them pirates, desperate adventurers,—these distorted or raging faces will draw them out of their regular and monotonous existence; they will go to see them as they go to melodramas, and through the same instinct which induces them to read novels in penny numbers. Add, by way of contrast, angelic women, tender and submissive, beautiful as angels.

1 For example, "as weeping Beauty's cheek at Sorrow's tale."
2 Here are verses like Pope, very beautiful and false:

"And havoc loath so much the waste of time,
She scarce had left an uncommitted crime.

One hour beheld him since the tide he stemm'd,
Disguised, discover'd, conquering, ta'en, condemn'd,
A chief on land, an outlaw on the deep,
Destroying, saving, prison'd, and asleep!"
Byron describes all this, and adds to these seductions a bewitching scenery, oriental or picturesque adornments; old Alpine castles, the Mediterranean waves, the setting suns of Greece, the whole in high relief, with marked shadows and brilliant colours. We are all of the people, as regards emotion; and the great lady, like the waiting-woman, sheds tears, without cavilling with the author as to the means he uses.

And yet, after all, there is a great deal of truth in Byron’s poems. No; this man is not a mere arranger of effects or an inventor of phrases. He has lived amidst the spectacles he describes; he has experienced the emotions he relates. He has been in the tent of Ali Pacha, and relished the strong savour of ocean adventure and savage manners. He has been a score of times near death,—in the Morea, in the anguish and the solitude of fever; at Suli, in a shipwreck; at Malta, in England, and in Italy, in the dangers of a duel, plots of insurrection, commencements of sudden attacks, at sea, in arms, on horseback, having seen assassination, wounds, agonies close to him, and that more than once.

“I am living here exposed to it (assassination) daily, for I have happened to make a powerful and unprincipled man my enemy; and I never sleep the worse for it, or ride in less solitary places, because precaution is useless, and one thinks of it as of a disease which may or may not strike.”

1 He spoke the truth; no one ever held himself more erect and firm in danger. One day, near the Gulf of San Fiorenzo, his yacht was thrown on the coast; the sea was terrific, and the rocks in sight; the passengers kissed their rosaries, or fainted with horror; and the two captains being consulted.

* * Moore’s Life, iv. 345.
declared shipwreck inevitable. "Well," said Lord Byron, "we are all born to die; I shall go with regret, but certainly not with fear." And he took off his clothes, begging the others to do the same, not that they could save themselves amidst such waves; but "it is every man's duty to endeavour to preserve the life God has given him; so I advise you all to strip: swimming, indeed, can be of little use in these billows; but as children, when tired with crying, sink placidly to repose, we, when exhausted with struggling, shall die the easier. . . ." He then sat down, folding his arms, very calm; he even joked with the captain, who was putting his dollars into his waistcoat pocket. . . . The ship approached the rocks. All this time Byron was not seen to change countenance. A man thus tried and moulded can paint extreme situations and sentiments. After all, they are never painted otherwise than by experience. The most inventive—Dante and Shakspeare—though quite different, yet do the same thing. However high their genius rose, it always had its feet on observation; and their most foolish, as well as their most splendid pictures, never offer to the world more than an image of their age, or of their own heart. At most, they deduce; that is, having derived from two or three features the inward qualities of the man within themselves and of the men around them, they draw thence, by a sudden ratiocination of which they have no consciousness, the varied skein of actions and sentiments. They may be artists, but they are observers. They may invent, but they describe. Their glory does not consist in the display of a phantasmagoria, but in the discovery of a truth. They are the first to enter some unexplored province of humanity, which becomes
their domain, and thenceforth supports their name like an appanage. Byron found his domain, which is that of sad and tender sentiments: it is a heath, and full of ruins; but he is at home there, and he is alone.

What an abode! And it is on this desolation that he dwells. He muses on it. See the brothers of Childe Harold pass—the characters who people it. One in his prison, chained up with his two remaining brothers. Their father and three others had perished fighting, or were burnt for their faith. One by one, before the eyes of the eldest, the last two languish and fade: a silent and slow agony amidst the damp darkness into which a beam of the sickly sun pierces through a crevice. After the death of the first, the survivors "begged as a boon" that he shall at least be buried on a spot "whereon the day might shine." The jailers

"Coldly laugh'd—and laid him there:
The flat and turfsless earth above
The being we so much did love;
His empty chain above it leant." 1

Then the youngest "faded" daily

With all the while a cheek whose bloom
Was as a mockery of the tomb,
Whose tints as gently sunk away
As a departing rainbow's ray." 2

But the pillars to which they are chained are too far apart,—the elder cannot approach his dying younger brother; he listens and hears the failing sighs; he cries for succour, and none comes. He bursts his chain with one strong bound: all is over. He takes that cold hand,

1 Byron's Works, x. The Prisoner of Chilten, c. vii. 234.
2 Ibid. c. viii. 235.
and then, before the motionless body, his senses are lost, his thoughts arrested; he is like a drowning man, who, after passing through pangs of agony, lets himself sink down like a stone, and no longer feels existence but by a complete petrifaction of horror. Here is another brother of Childe Harold, Mazeppa, bound naked on a wild horse, rushing over the steppes. He writhes, and his swollen limbs, cut by the cords, are bleeding. A whole day the course continues, and behind him the wolves are howling. . The night through he hears their long monotonous chase, and at the end his energy fails.

"... The earth gave way, the skies roll'd round,  
I seem'd to sink upon the ground;  
But err'd, for I was fastly bound.  
My heart turn'd sick, my brain grew sore,  
And throb'd awhile, then beat no more;  
The skies spun like a mighty wheel;  
I saw the trees like drunkards reel,  
And a slight flash sprang o'er my eyes,  
Which saw no further: he who dies  
Can die no more than then I died. . . .  
I felt the blackness come and go,  
And strove to wake; but could not make  
My senses climb up from below:  
I felt as on a plank at sea,  
When all the waves that dash o'er thee,  
At the same time upheave and whelm,  
And hurl thee towards a desert realm."  

Shall I enumerate them all? Hugo, Parisina, the Foscari, the Giacour, the Corsair. His hero is always a man striving with the worst anguish, face to face with shipwreck, torture, death,—his own painful and

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1 Byron's Works, xi., Mazeppa, c. xiii. 167.
prolonged death, the bitter death of his well-beloved, with remorse for his companion, amidst the gloomy prospects of a threatening eternity, with no other support but innate energy and hardened pride. These men have desired too much, too impetuously, with a senseless swing, like a horse which does not feel the bit, and thenceforth their inner doom drives them to the abyss which they see, and cannot escape from. What a night was that of Alp before Corinth! He is a renegade, and comes with the Mussulmans to besiege the Christians, his old friends—Minotti, the father of the girl he loves. Next day he is to lead the assault, and he thinks of his death, which he forebodes, the carnage of his own soldiers, which he is preparing. There is no inner support, but rooted resentment and a firm and stern will. The Mussulmans despise him, the Christians execrate him, and his glory only publishes his treason. Dejected and fevered, he passes through the sleeping camp, and wanders on the shore:

"Tis midnight: on the mountains brown
The cold, round moon shines deeply down;
Blue roll the waters, blue the sky
Spreads like an ocean hung on high,
Bespangled with those isles of light... The waves on either shore lay there
Calm, clear, and azure as the air;
And scarce their foam the pebbles shook,
But murmur'd meekly as the brook.
The winds were pillow'd on the waves;
The banners droop'd along their stakes.
And that deep silence was unbroken,
Save where the watch his signal spoke,
Save where the steed neighed oft and shrill.
And the wide hum of that wild host
Rustled like leaves from coast to coast.

How the heart sickens before such spectacles! What a contrast between his agony and the peace of immortal nature! How man stretches then his arms towards ideal beauty, and how impotently they fall back at the contact of our clay and mortality! Alp advances over the sandy shore to the foot of the bastion, exposed to the fire of the sentinels; and he hardly thinks of it:

"And he saw the lean dogs beneath the wall
Hold o'er the dead their carnival,
Gorging and growling o'er carcasse and limb;
They were too busy to bark at him!
From a Tartar's skull they had stripped the flesh,
As ye peel the fig when its fruit is fresh;
And their white tusks crunched o'er the whiter skull,
As it slipp'd through their jaws, when their edge grew dull
As they lazily mumbled the bones of the dead;
When they scarce could rise from the spot where they fed
So well had they broken a lingering fast
With those who had fallen for that night's repast.
And Alp knew, by the turbans that roll'd on the sand,
The foremost of these were the best of his band:
Crimson and green were the shawls of their wear,
And each scalp had a single long tuft of hair,
All the rest was shaven and bare.
The scalps were in the wild dog's maw,
The hair was tangled round his jaw.
But close by the shore on the edge of the gulf,
There sat a vulture flapping a wolf,
Who had stolen from the hills, but kept away,
Scared by the dogs, from the human prey;

1 Byron's Works, x., The Siege of Corinth, c. xi. 114.
But he seized on his share of a steed that lay,  
Pick'd by the birds, on the sands of the bay.”

Such is the goal of man; the hot frenzy of life ends here; buried or not, it matters little: vultures or jackals, one gravedigger is as good as another. The storm of his rages and his efforts have but served to cast him to these animals for their food, and to their beaks and jaws he comes only with the sentiment of frustrated hopes and insatiable desires. Could any of us forget the death of Lara after once reading it? Has any one elsewhere seen, save in Shak speare, a sadder picture of the destiny of a man vainly rearing against inevitable fate? Though generous, like Macbeth, he has, like Macbeth, dared everything against law and conscience, even against pity and the most ordinary feelings of honour. Crimes committed have forced him into other crimes, and blood poured out has made him glide into a pool of blood. As a corsair, he has slain; as a cut-throat, he assassinates; and his former murders which haunt his dreams come with their bat’s-wings beating against the portals of his brain. He does not drive them away, these black visitors; though the mouth remains silent, the pallid brow and strange smile bear witness to their approach. And yet it is a noble spectacle to see man standing with calm countenance even under their touch. The last day comes, and six inches of iron suffice for all this energy and fury. Lara is lying beneath a lime tree, and his wound “is bleeding fast from life away.” With each convulsion the stream gushes blacker, then stops; the blood flows now only drop by drop, and his brow is already moist, his eyes

1 Byron's Works, x., The Siege of Corinth, c. xvi. 123.
dim. The victors arrive—he does not deign to answer them; the priest brings near the absolving cross, "but he look’d upon it with an eye profane." What remains to him of life is for his poor page, the only being who loved him, who has followed him to the end, and who now tries to stanch the blood from his wound:

"He scarce can speak, but motions him 'tis vain,
He clasps the hand that pang which would assuage,
And sadly smiles his thanks to that dark page, . . .
His dying tones are in that other tongue,
To which some strange remembrance wildly clung. . . .
And once, as Kaled's answering accents ceased,
Rose Lara's hand, and pointed to the East:
Whether (as then the breaking sun from high
Roll'd back the clouds) the morrow caught his eye,
Or that 'twas chance, or some remember'd scene,
That raised his arm to point where such had been,
Scarce Kaled seem'd to know, but turn'd away,
As if his heart abhorr'd that coming day,
And shrunk his glance before that morning light,
To look on Lara's brow—where all grew night. . . .
But from his visage little could we guess,
So unrepentant, dark, and passionless. . . .
But gasping heaved the breath that Lara drew,
And dull the film along his dim eye grew;
His limbs stretch'd fluttering, and his head droop'd o'er." ¹

All is over, and of this haughty spirit there remains but a poor piece of clay. After all, it is the desirable lot of such hearts; they have spent life amiss, and only rest well in the tomb.

A strange and altogether northern poetry, with its root in the Edda and its flower in Shakspeare, born

¹ Byron's Works, x.; Lara, c. 2, st. 17-20, 60.
long ago under an inclement sky, on the shores of a stormy ocean,—the work of a too wilful, too strong, too sombre race,—and which, after lavishing its images of desolation and heroism, ends by stretching like a black veil over the whole of living nature the dream of universal destruction: this dream is here, as in the Edda, almost equally grand:

"I had a dream, which was not all a dream.
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air,
Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day...
Forests were set on fire—but hour by hour
They fell and faded—and the crackling trunks
Extinguish'd with a crash—and all was black...
And they did live by watchfires—and the thrones,
The palaces of crowned kings—the huts,
The habitations of all things which dwell,
Were burnt for beacons; cities were consumed,
And men were gathered round their blazing homes
To look once more into each other's face...
The brows of men by the despairing light
Wore an unearthly aspect, as by fits
The flashes fell upon them; some lay down
And hid their eyes and wept; and some did rest
Their chins upon their clenched hands, and smiled;
And others hurried to and fro, and fed
Their funeral piles with fuel, and look'd up
With mad disquietude on the dull sky,
The pall of a past world; and then again
With curses cast them down upon the dust,
And gnash'd their teeth and howl'd: the wild birds shriek'd,
And, terrify'd, did flutter on the ground,
Came tame and tremulous; and vipers crawl'd
And twined themselves among the multitude,
Hissing, but stingless—they were slain for food:
And War, which for a moment was no more,
Did glut himself again;—a meal was bought
With blood, and each sate sullenly apart
Gorging himself in gloom: no love was left;
All earth was but one thought—and that was death,
Immediate and inglorious; and the pang
Of famine fed upon all entrails—men
Died, and their bones were tombless as their flesh;
The meagre by the meagre were devour'd,
Even dogs assail'd their masters, all save one,
And he was faithful to a corse, and kept
The birds and beasts and famish'd men at bay,
Till hunger clung them, or the dropping dead
Lured their lank jaws; himself sought out no food,
But with a piteous and perpetual moan,
And a quick desolate cry, licking the hand
Which answer'd not with a caress—he died.
The crowd was famish'd by degrees; but two
Of an enormous city did survive,
And they were enemies: they met beside
The dying embers of an altar-place
Where had been heap'd a mass of holy things
For an unholy usage; they raked up,
And shivering scraped with their cold skeleton hands
The feeble ashes, and their feeble breath
Blew for a little life, and made a flame
Which was a mockery; then they lifted up
Their eyes as it grew lighter, and beheld
Each other's aspects—saw, and shriek'd, and died—
Even of their mutual hideousness they died."

\footnote{Byron's Works, x. ; Darkness, 283.}
Amongst these unrestrained and gloomy poems, which incessantly return and dwell on the same subject, there is one more imposing and lofty than the rest, Manfred, twin-brother of the greatest poem of the age, Goethe's Faust. Goethe says of Byron: "This singular intellectual poet has taken my Faustus to himself, and extracted from it the strongest nourishment for his hypochondriac humour. He has made use of the impelling principles in his own way, for his own purposes, so that no one of them remains the same; and it is particularly on this account that I cannot enough admire his genius." The play is indeed original. Byron writes: "His (Goethe's) Faust I never read, for I don't know German; but Matthew Monk Lewis, in 1816, at Coligny, translated most of it to me vivâ voce, and I was naturally much struck with it; but it was the Steinbach and the Jungfrau and something else, much more than Faustus, that made me write Manfred."¹ Goethe adds: "The whole is so completely formed anew, that it would be an interesting task for the critic to point out not only the alterations he (Byron) has made, but their degree of resemblance or dissimilarity to the original." Let us speak of it, then, quite freely: the subject of Manfred is the dominant idea of the age, expressed so as to display the contrast of two masters, and of two nations.

What constitutes Goethe's glory is, that in the nineteenth century he did produce an epic poem—I mean a poem in which genuine gods act and speak.

¹Byron's Works, iv.490; Letter to Mr. Murray, Ravenna, June 7, 1820.
This appeared impossible in the nineteenth century, since the special work of our age is the refined consideration of creative ideas, and the suppression of the poetic characters by which other ages have never failed to represent them. Of the two divine families, the Greek and the Christian, neither seemed capable of re-entering the epic world. Classic literature dragged down in its fall the mythological puppets, and the ancient gods slept on their old Olympus, whither history and archæology alone might go to arouse them. The angels and saints of the Middle-ages, as strange and almost as far from our thoughts, slept on the vellum of their missals and in the niches of their cathedrals; and if a poet like Chateaubriand, tried to make them enter the modern world, he succeeded only in degrading them, and in making of them vestry decorations and operatic machinery. The mythic credulity disappeared amid the growth of experience, the mystic amid the growth of prosperity. Paganism, at the contact of science, was reduced to the recognition of natural forces; Christianity at the contact of morality, was reduced to the adoration of the ideal. In order again to deify physical powers, man should have become once more a healthy child, as in Homer’s time. In order again to deify spiritual powers, man should have become once more a sickly child as in Dante’s time. But he was an adult, and could not ascend again to civilisations or epics, from which the current of his thought and of his life had withdrawn him for ever. How was he to be shown his gods, the modern gods? how could he reclothe them in a personal and visible form, since he had

1 The angel of holy love, the angel of the ocean, the choirs of happy spirits. See this at length in the Martyrs.
toiled to strip them precisely of all personal and sensible form, and had succeeded in this. Instead of rejecting legend, Goethe took it up again. He chose a mediæval story for his theme. Carefully, scrupulously, he tracked old manners and old beliefs; an alchemist's laboratory, a sorcerer's conjuring-book, coarse villagers, students' or drunkards' gaiety, a witches' meeting on the Brocken, a mass in church; we might fancy we saw an engraving of Luther's time, conscientious and minute: nothing is omitted. Heavenly characters appear in consecrated attitudes after the text of Scripture, like the old mysteries: the Lord with his angels, then with the devil, who comes to ask permission to tempt Faust, as formerly he tempted Job; heaven, as St. Francis imagined it and Van Eyck painted it, with anchorites, holy women and doctors—some in a landscape with bluish rocks, others above in the sublime air, hovering in choirs about the Virgin in glory, one tier above another. Goethe affects even to be so orthodox as to write under each her Latin name, and her due niche in the Vulgate. And this very fidelity proclaims him a sceptic. We see that if he resuscitates the ancient world, it is as a historian, not as a believer. He is only a Christian through remembrance and poetic feeling. In him the modern spirit overflows designedly the narrow vessel in which he designedly seems to enclose it. The thinker percolates through the narrator. Every instant a calculated word, which seems involuntary, opens up glimpses of philosophy, beyond the veils of tradition. Who are they, these supernatural

personages,—this god, this Mephistopheles, these angels? Their substance incessantly dissolves and re-forms, to show or hide alternately the idea which fills it. Are they abstractions or characters? Mephistopheles, a revolutionary and a philosopher, who has read Candide, and cynically jeers at the Powers,—is he anything but "the spirit of negation?"

The angels

"Rejoice to share
The wealth exuberant of all that's fair,
Which lives, and has its being everywhere!
And the creative essence which surrounds,
And lives in all, and worketh ever more,
Encompass... within love's gracious bounds,
And all the world of things, which flit before
The gaze in seeming fitful and obscure,
Do... in lasting thoughts embody and secure." ¹

Are these angels, for an instant at least, anything else than the ideal intelligence which comes, through sympathy, to love all, and through ideas, to comprehend all? What shall we say of this Deity, at first biblical and individual, who little by little is unshaped, vanishes and, sinking to the depths, behind the splendours of living nature and mystic reverie, is confused with the inaccessible absolute? Thus is the whole poem unfolded, action and characters, men and gods, antiquity and middle-ages, aggregate and details, always on the confines of two worlds—one visible and figurative, the other intelligible and formless; one comprehending the moving externals of history or of life, and all that hued and perfumed bloom which nature lavishes on the sur-

face of existence, the other containing the profound generative powers and invisible fixed laws by which all these living beings come to the light of day. At last we see our gods: we no longer parody them, like our ancestors, by idols or persons; we perceive them as they are in themselves, and we have no need, in order to see them, to renounce poetry, nor break with the past. We remain on our knees before the shrines where men have prayed for three thousand years; we do not tear a single rose from the chaplets with which they have crowned their divine Madonnas; we do not extinguish a single candle which they have crowded on the altar steps; we behold with an artist’s pleasure the precious shrines where, amidst the wrought candlesticks, the suns of diamonds, the gorgeous copes, they have scattered the purest treasures of their genius and their heart. But our thoughts pierce further than our eyes. For us, at certain moments, these draperies, this marble, all this pomp vacillates; it is no longer aught but beautiful phantoms; it vanishes in the smoke, and we discover through it and behind it the impalpable ideal which has set up these pillars, lighted these roofs, and hovered for centuries over the kneeling multitude.

To understand the legend and also to understand life, is the object of this work, and of the whole work of Goethe. Everything, brutish or rational, vile or sublime, fantastic or tangible, is a group of powers, of which our mind, through study and sympathy, may reproduce in itself the elements and the disposition. Let us reproduce it, and give it in our thought a new existence. Is a gossip like Martha, babbling and fool,

1 Goethe sings: “Wer ruft das Einsame zur allgemeinen Weite
   Wo es in herrlichen Accorden schlägt?”
ish—a drunkard like Frosch, brawling and dirty, and the other Dutch boors—unworthy to enter a picture? Even the female apes, and the apes who sit beside the cauldron, watching that it does not boil over, with their hoarse cries and disordered fancies, may repay the trouble of art in restoring them. Wherever there is life, even bestial or maniacal, there is beauty. The more we look upon nature, the more we find it divine—divine even in rocks and plants. Consider these forests, they seem motionless; but the leaves breathe, and the sap mounts insensibly through the massive trunks and branches, to the slender shoots, stretched like fingers at the end of the twigs; it fills the swollen ducts, leaks out in living forms, loads the frail aments with fecundating dust, spreads profusely through the fermenting air the vapours and odours: this luminous air, this dome of verdure, this long colonnade of trees, this silent soil, labour and are transformed; they accomplish a work, and the poet’s heart has but to listen to them to find a voice for their obscure instincts. They speak in his heart; still better, they sing, and other beings do the same; each, by its distinct melody, short or long, strange or simple, solely adapted to its nature, capable of manifesting it fully, in the same manner as a sound, by its pitch, its height, its force, manifests the inner structure of the body which has produced it. This melody the poet respects; he avoids altering it by confusing its ideas or accent; his whole care is to keep it intact and pure. Thus is his work produced, an echo of universal nature, a vast chorus in which gods, men, past, present, all periods of history, all conditions of life, all orders of existence agree without confusion, and in which the flexible genius of the
musician, who is alternately transformed into each one of them in order to interpret and comprehend them, only bears witness to his own thought in giving an insight, beyond this immense harmony, into the group of ideal laws whence it is derived, and the inner reason which sustains it.

Beside this lofty conception, what is the supernatural part of Manfred? Doubtless Byron is moved by the great things of nature; he has just left the Alps; he has seen those glaciers which are like “a frozen hurricane”—those “torrents which roll the sheeted silver’s waving column o’er the crag’s headlong perpendicular, like the pale courser’s tail, as told in the Apocalypse,”—but he has brought nothing from them but images. His witch, his spirits, his Arimanes, are but stage gods. He believes in them no more than we do. Genuine gods are created with much greater difficulty; we must believe in them; we must, like Goethe, have assisted long at their birth, like philosophers and scholars; we must have seen of them more than their externals. He who, whilst continuing a poet, becomes a naturalist and geologist, who has followed in the fissures of the rocks the tortuous waters slowly distilled, and driven at length by their own weight to the light, may ask himself, as the Greeks did formerly, when they saw them roll and sparkle in their emerald tints, what these waters might be thinking, whether they thought. What a strange life is theirs, alternately at rest and in violent motion! How far removed from ours! With what effort must we tear ourselves from our worn and complicated passions, to comprehend the youth and divine simplicity of a being without reflection and form! How difficult is such a work for a modern man!
impossible for an Englishman! Shelley, Keats approached it,—thanks to the nervous delicacy of their sickly or overflowing imagination; but how partial still was this approach! And how we feel, on reading them, that they would have needed the aid of public culture, and the aptitude of national genius, which Goethe possessed! That which the whole of civilisation has alone developed in the Englishman, is energetic will and practical faculties. Here man has braced himself up in his efforts, become concentrated in resistance, fond of action, and hence shut out from pure speculation, from wavering sympathy, and from disinterested art. In him metaphysical liberty has perished under utilitarian preoccupation, and pantheistic reverie under moral prejudices. How would he frame and bend his imagination so as to follow the numberless and fugitive outlines of existences, especially of vague existences? How would he leave his religion so as to reproduce indifferently the powers of indifferent nature? And who is further from flexibility and indifference than he? The flowing water, which in Goethe takes the mould of all the contours of the soil, and which we perceive in the sinuous and luminous distance beneath the golden mist which it exhales, was in Byron suddenly frozen into a mass of ice, and makes but a rigid block of crystal. Here, as elsewhere, there is but one character, the same as before. Men, gods, nature, all the changing and multiplex world of Goethe, has vanished. The poet alone subsists, as expressed in his character. Inevitably imprisoned within himself, he could see nothing but himself; if he must come to other existences, it is that they may reply to him; and through this pretended epic he persisted in his eternal monologue
But how all these powers, assembled in a single being, make him great! Into what mediocrity and platitude sinks the Faust of Goethe, compared to Manfred! As soon as we cease to see humanity in this Faust, what does he become? Is he a hero? A sad hero, who has no other task but to speak, is afraid, studies the shades of his sensations, and walks about! His worst action is to seduce a grisette, and to go and dance by night in bad company—two exploits which many a German student has accomplished. His wilfulness is whim, his ideas are longings and dreams. A poet’s soul in a scholar’s head, both unfit for action, and not harmonising well together; discord within, and weakness without; in short, character is wanting: it is German all over. By his side, what a man is Manfred! He is a man; there is no fitter word, or one which could depict him better. He will not, at the sight of a spirit, “quake like a crawling, cowering, timorous worm.” He will not regret that “he has neither land, nor pence, nor worldly honours, nor influence.” He will not let himself be duped by the devil like a schoolboy, or go and amuse himself like a cockney with the phantasmagoria of the Brocken. He has lived like a feudal chief, not like a scholar who has taken his degree; he has fought, mastered others; he knows how to master himself. If he has studied magic arts, it is not from an alchemist’s curiosity, but from a spirit of revolt:

"From my youth upwards
My spirit walk’d not with the souls of men,
Nor look’d upon the earth with human eyes;
The thirst of their ambition was not mine,
The aim of their existence was not mine;"
My joys, my griefs, my passions, and my powers
Made me a stranger; though I wore the form,
I had no sympathy with breathing flesh.
My joy was in the Wilderness, to breathe
The difficult air of the iced mountain's top,
Where the birds dare not build, nor insect's wing
Flit o'er the herbless granite, or to plunge
Into the torrent, and to roll along
On the swift whirl of the new breaking wave.
To follow through the night the moving moon,
The stars and their development; or catch
The dazzling lightnings till my eyes grew dim,
Or to look, list'ning, on the scatter'd leaves,
While Autumn winds were at their evening song.
These were my pastimes, and to be alone;
For if the beings, of whom I was one,—
Hating to be so,—cross'd me in my path,
I felt myself degraded back to them,
And was all clay again. . . . 1
I could not tame my nature down; for he
Must serve who fain would sway—and soothe—and sue—
And watch all time—and pry into all place—
And be a living lie—who would become
A mighty thing amongst the mean, and such
The mass are; I disdain'd to mingle with
A herd, though to be leader—and of wolves. . . . 2

He lives alone, and he cannot live alone. The deep
source of love, cut off from its natural issues, then over-
flows and lays waste the heart which refused to expand.
He has loved, too well, one too near to him, his sister it
may be; she has died of it, and impotent remorse fills
the soul which no human occupation could satisfy:

1 Byron's Works, xi.; Manfred, ii. 2, 32.
2 Ibid.; Manfred, iii. 1, 56.
"... My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the Furies;—I have gnash'd
My teeth in darkness till returning morn,
Then cursed myself till sunset;—I have pray'd
For madness as a blessing—'tis denied me.
I have affronted death—but in the war
Of elements the waters shrunk from me,
And fatal things pass'd harmless—the cold hand
Of an all-pitiless demon held me back,
Back by a single hair, which would not break.
In fantasy, imagination, all
The affluence of my soul. ... I plunged deep,
But, like an ebbing wave, it dashed me back
Into the gulf of my unfathom'd thought... I
I dwell in my despair,
And live, and live for ever."¹

He only wishes to see her once more: to this sole and all-
powerful desire flow all the energies of his soul. He calls
her up in the midst of spirits; she appears, but answers
not. He prays to her—with what cries, what doleful
cries of deep anguish! How he loves! With what
yearning and effort all his downtrodden and outcrushed
tenderness gushes out and escapes at the sight of those
well-beloved eyes, which he sees for the last time!
With what enthusiasm his convulsive arms are stretched
towards that frail form which, shuddering, has quitted
the tomb!—towards those cheeks in which the blood,
forcibly recalled, plants "a strange hectic—like the
unnatural red which Autumn plants upon the parish'd
leaf."

"... Hear me, hear me—
Astarte! my beloved! speak to me:

¹ Byron's Works, xi.; Manfred, ii. 2, 35.
I have so much endured—so much endure—
Look on me! the grave hath not changed thee more
Than I am changed for thee. Thou lovedst me
Too much as I loved thee: we were not made
To torture thus each other, though it were
The deadliest sin to love as we have loved.
Say that thou loath'st me not—that I do bear
This punishment for both—that thou wilt be
One of the blessed—and that I shall die;
For hitherto all hateful things conspire
To bind me in existence—in a life
Which makes me shrink from immortality—
A future like the past. I cannot rest.
I know not what I ask, nor what I seek:
I feel but what thou art—and what I am;
And I would hear yet once before I perish
The voice which was my music—Speak to me!
For I have call'd on thee in the still night,
Startled the slumbering birds from the hush'd boughs,
And woke the mountain wolves, and made the caves
Acquainted with thy vainly echoed name,
Which answer'd me—many things answer'd me—
Spirits and men—but thou wert silent all. . . .
Speak to me! I have wander'd o'er the earth,
And never found thy likeness—Speak to me!
Look on the fiends around—they feel for me:
I fear them not, and feel for thee alone—
Speak to me! though it be in wrath;—but say—
I reck not what—but let me hear thee once—
This once—once more!" ¹

She speaks. What a sad and doubtful reply! Manfred's limbs are convulsed when she disappears. But an instant after the spirits see that:

¹ Byron's Works, xi.: Manfred, ii. 47.
"... He mastereth himself, and makes
His torture tributary to his will.
Had he been one of us, he would have made
An awful spirit." 1

Will is the unshaken basis of this soul. He did not bend before the chief of the spirits; he stood firm and calm before the infernal throne, whilst all the demons were raging who would tear him to pieces: now he dies, and they assail him, but he still strives and conquers:

". . . Thou hast no power upon me, that I feel;
Thou never shalt possess me, that I know:
What I have done is done; I bear within
A torture which could nothing gain from thine:
The mind which is immortal makes itself
Requital for its good or evil thoughts—
Is its own origin of ill and end—
And its own place and time—its innate sense,
When stripp'd of this mortality, derives
No colour from the fleeting things without;
'But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,
Born from the knowledge of its own desert.
Thou didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me;
I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey—
But was my own destroyer, and will be
My own hereafter.—Back, ye baffled fiends!
The hand of death is on me—but not yours!" 2

This "I," the invincible I, who suffices to himself, on whom nothing has a hold, demons nor men, the sole author of his own good and ill, a sort of suffering or fallen god, but god always, even in its quivering flesh amidst his soiled and blighted destiny,—such is the hero and

1 Byron's Works, xi.; Manfred, ii. 4. 49. 2 Ibid. iii. 4. 70.
the work of this mind, and of the men of his race. If
Goethe was the poet of the universe, Byron was the
poet of the individual; and if in one the German
genius found its interpreter, the English genius found
its interpreter in the other.

V

We can well imagine that Englishmen clamoured at
and repudiated the monster. Southey, the poet-laureate,
said of him, in good biblical style, that he savoured of
Moloch and Belial—most of all of Satan; and, with
the generosity of a brother poet, called the attention
of Government to him. We should, fill many pages
if we were to copy the reproaches of the respectable
reviews against these "men of diseased hearts and de-
praved imaginations, who, forming a system of opinions
to suit their own unhappy course of conduct, have re-
belled against the holiest ordinances of human society,
and, hating that revealed religion which, with all their
efforts and bravadoes, they are unable entirely to dis-
believe, labour to make others as miserable as them-
selves, by infecting them with a moral virus that eats
into the soul." 1 This sounds like the emphasis of an
episcopal charge and of scholastic pedantry: in England
the press does the duty of the police, and it never did
it more violently than at that time. Opinion backed
the press. Several times, in Italy, Lord Byron saw
gentlemen leave a drawing-room with their wives, when
he was announced. Owing to his title and celebrity,
the scandal which he caused was more conspicuous than
any other: he was a public sinner. One day an ob-

1 Southey, Preface to A Vision of Judgment.
scure parson sent him a prayer which he had found amongst the papers of his wife—a charming and pious lady, recently dead, and who had secretly prayed to God for the conversion of the great sinner. Conservative and Protestant England, after a quarter of a century of moral wars, and two centuries of moral education, carried its severity and rigour to extremes; and Puritan intolerance, like Catholic intolerance previously in Spain, put recusants out of the pale of the law. The proscription of voluptuous or abandoned life, the narrow observation of order and decency, the respect of all police, human and divine; the necessary bows at the mere name of Pitt, of the king, the church, the God of the Bible; the attitude of the gentleman in a white tie, conventional, inflexible, implacable,—such were the customs then met with across the Channel, a hundred times more tyrannical than now-a-days: at that time, as Stendhal says, a peer at his fireside dared not cross his legs, for fear of its being improper. England held herself stiff, uncomfortably laced in her stays of decorum. Hence arose two sources of misery: a man suffers, and is tempted to throw down the ugly choking apparatus, when he is sure that it can be done secretly. On one side constraint, on the other hypocrisy—these are the two vices of English civilisation; and it was these which Byron, with his poet's discernment and his combative instincts, attacked.

He had seen them from the first; true artists are perspicacious: it is in this that they outstrip us; we judge from hearsay and formulas, like cockneys; they, like eccentric beings, from accomplished facts, and things: at twenty-two he perceived the tedium born of constraint, desolating all high life:
There stands the noble hostess, nor shall sink
With the three thousandth curtsy;...
'Saloon, room, hall, o'erflow beyond their brink,
And long the latest of arrivals halts,
'Midst royal dukes and dames condemn'd to climb.
And gain an inch of staircase at a time." 1

He wrote also:

"He (the Count) ought to have been in the country during
the hunting season, with 'a select party of distinguished guests,'
as the papers term it. He ought to have seen the gentleman
after dinner (on the hunting days), and the soirée ensuing
thereupon,—and the women looking as if they had hunted, or
rather been hunted; and I could have wished that he had been
at a dinner in town, which I recollect at Lord C * * 's—small,
but select, and composed of the most amusing people. The
dessert was hardly on the table, when, out of twelve, I counted
five asleep."

As for the morals of the upper classes, this is what he
says:

"Went to my box at Covent Garden to-night. . . . Casting
my eyes round the house, in the next box to me, and the next,
and the next, were the most distinguished old and young
Babylonians of quality. . . . It was as if the house had been
divided between your public and your understood courtesans;
—but the intriguantes much outnumbered the regular merce-
naries. Now, where lay the difference between Pauline and
her mother, . . . and Lady * * and daughter? except that the
two last may enter Carlton and any other house, and the two
first are limited to the Opera and b—house. How I do
delight in observing life as it really is!—and myself, after all,
the worst of any!" 3

1 Byron's Works, xvii. ; Don Juan, c. 11, st. lxvii.
2 Ibid. vi. 18 ; Letter 512, April 5, 1828.
3 Ibid. ii. 303 ; Journal Dec. 17, 1813.
Decorum and debauchery; moral hypocrites, "qui mettent leurs vertus en mettant leurs gants blancs;"\textsuperscript{1} an oligarchy which, to preserve its places and its sinecures, ravages Europe, preys on Ireland, and excites the people by making use of the grand words, virtue, Christianity, and liberty: there was truth in all these invectives.\textsuperscript{2} It is only thirty years since the ascendancy of the middle class diminished the privileges and corruptions of the great; but at that time hard words could with justice be thrown at their heads. Byron said, quoting from Voltaire:

"'La Pudeur s'est enflée des cœurs, et s'est refugiée sur les lèvres.' . . . 'Plus les mœurs sont dépravées, plus les expressions deviennent mesurées; on croit regagner en langage ce qu'on a perdu en vertu.' This is the real fact, as applicable to the degraded and hypocritical mass which leavens the present English generation; and it is the only answer they deserve. . . . Cant is the crying sin of this double-dealing and false-speaking time of selfish spoilers."\textsuperscript{3}

And then he wrote his masterpiece, \textit{Don Juan}.\textsuperscript{4}

All here was new, form as well as substance; for he had entered into a new world. The Englishman, the Northman, transplanted amongst southern manners and into Italian life, had become imbued with a new sap, which made him bear new fruit. He had been induced to read\textsuperscript{5} the rather free satires of Buratti, and the

\textsuperscript{1} Alfred de Musset.
\textsuperscript{2} See his terrible satirical poem, \textit{The Vision of Judgment}, against Southey, George IV., and official pomp.
\textsuperscript{3} Byron's Works, xvi. 131; Preface to \textit{Don Juan}, cantos vi. vii. and viii.
\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Don Juan} is a satire on the abuses in the present state of society, and not a eulogy of vice.
\textsuperscript{5} Stendhal, \textit{Mémoires sur Lord Byron}. 
more than voluptuous sonnets of Baffo. He lived in the happy Venetian society, still exempt from political animosities, where care seemed a folly, where life was looked upon as a carnival, pleasure displayed itself openly, not timid and hypocritical, but loosely arrayed and commended. He amused himself here, impetuously at first, more than sufficient, even more than too much, and almost killed himself by these amusements; but after vulgar gallantries, having felt a real feeling of love, he became a cavalier servente, after the fashion of the country where he dwelt, with the consent of the family of the lady, offering his arm, carrying her shawl, a little awkwardly at first, and wonderingly, but on the whole happier than he had ever been, and fanned by a warm breath of pleasure and abandon. He saw in Italy the overthrow of all English morality, conjugal infidelity established as a rule, amorous fidelity raised to a duty: "There is no convincing a woman here that she is in the smallest degree deviating from the rule of right or the fitness of things in having an amoroso.\(^1\) . . . Love (the sentiment of love) is not merely an excuse for it, but makes it an actual virtue, provided it is disinterested, and not a caprice, and is confined to one object."\(^2\) A little later he translated the Morgante Maggiore of Pulci, to show "What was permitted in a Catholic country and a bigoted age to a churchman on the score of religion, and to silence those buffoons who accuse me of attacking the Liturgy."\(^3\) He rejoiced in this liberty and this ease, and resolved never to fall again under the pedantic inquisition, which in his country had condemned and

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\(^1\) Byron's Works, iii. 333; Letter to Murray, Venice, Jan. 2, 1817.

\(^2\) Ibid. iii. 363; Letter to Moore, Venice, March 25, 1817.

\(^3\) Ibid. iv. 279: Letter to Murray, Ravenna, Feb. 7, 1820.
damned him past forgiveness. He wrote his *Beppo* like an improvisatore, with a charming freedom, a flowing and fantastic lightness of mood, and contrasted in it the recklessness and happiness of Italy with the prejudices and repulsiveness of England:

"I like... to see the Sun set, sure he'll rise to morrow,
Not through a misty morning twinkling weak as
A drunken man's dead eye in maudlin sorrow,
But with all Heaven t' himself; that day will break as
Beauteous as cloudless, nor be forced to borrow
That sort of farthing candlelight which glimmers
Where reeking London's smoky caldron simmers.

I love the language, that soft bastard Latin,
Which melts like kisses from a female mouth,
And sounds as if it should be writ on satin,
With syllables which breathe of the sweet South;
And gentle liquids gliding all so pat in,
That not a single accent seems uncouth,
Like our harsh northern whistling, grunting guttural,
Which we're obliged to hiss, and spit, and sputter 'll

I like the women too (forgive my folly),
From the rich peasant cheek of ruddy bronze,
And large black eyes that flash on you a volley
Of rays that say a thousand things at once,
To the high dam's brow, more melancholy,
But clear, and with a wild and liquid glance,
Heart on her lips, and soul within her eyes,
Soft as her clime, and sunny as her skies."¹

With other manners there existed in Italy another morality; there is one for every age, race, and sky—I mean that the ideal model varies with the circumstances

¹ Byron's *Works*, xxl.; *Beppo*, c. xliii.—xliv. 121.
which fashion it. In England the severity of the climate, the warlike energy of the race, and the liberty of the institutions prescribe an active life, severe manners, Puritanic religion, the marriage tie strictly kept, a feeling of duty and self-command. In Italy the beauty of the climate, the innate sense of the beautiful, and the despotism of the government induced an idle life, loose manners, imaginative religion, the culture of the arts, and the search after happiness. Each model has its beauties and its blots,—the epicurean artist like the political moralist;¹ each shows by its greatnesses the littlenesses of the other, and, to set in relief the disadvantages of the second, Lord Byron had only to set in relief the seductions of the first.

Thereupon he went in search of a hero, and did not find one, which, in this age of heroes, is "an uncommon want." For lack of a better he chose "our ancient friend Don Juan,"—a scandalous choice: what an outcry the English moralists will make! But, to cap the horror, this Don Juan is not wicked, selfish, odious, like his fellows; he does not seduce, he is no corrupter. When an opportunity arises, he lets himself drift; he has a heart and senses, and, under a beautiful sun, they are easily touched: at sixteen a youth cannot help himself, nor at twenty, nor perhaps at thirty. Lay it to the charge of human nature, my dear moralists; it is not I who made it as it is. If you will grumble, address yourselves higher: we are here as painters, not as makers of human puppets, and we do not answer for the inner structure of our dancing-dolls. Our Don Juan

¹ See Stendhal, *Vie de Giacomo Rossini,* and Dean Stanley's *Life of Dr. Arnold.* The contrast is complete. See also Mad. de Staël's *Corinne,* where this opposition is very clearly grasped.
is now going about; he goes about in many places, and in all he is young; we will not launch thunderbolts on his head because he is young; that fashion is past: the green devils and their capers only come on the stage in the last act of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. And, moreover, Juan is so amiable! After all, what has he done that others don't do? He has been a lover of Catherine II., but he only followed the lead of the diplomatic corps and the whole Russian army. Let him sow his wild oats; the good grain will spring up in its time. Once in England, he will behave himself decently. I confess that he may even there, when provoked, go a gleaning in the conjugal gardens of the aristocracy; but in the end he will settle, go and pronounce moral speeches in Parliament, become a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. If you wish absolutely to have him punished, we will "make him end in hell, or in an unhappy marriage, not knowing which would be the severest: the Spanish tradition says hell: but it is probably only an allegory of the other state." At all events, married or damned, the good folk at the end of the piece will have the pleasure of knowing that he is burning all alive.

Is not this a singular apology? Does it not aggravate the fault? Let us wait; we know not yet the whole venom of the book: together with Juan there are Donna Julia, Haidée, Gulbeyaz, Dudu, and many more. It is here the diabolical poet digs in his sharpest claw, and he takes care to dig it into our weakest side. What will the clergymen and white-chokered reviewers say? For, to speak the truth, there is no

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preventing it: we must read on, in spite of ourselves. Twice or three times following we meet here with happiness; and when I say happiness, I mean profound and complete happiness—not mere voluptuousness, not obscene gaiety; we are far removed from the nicely-written ribaldry of Dorat, and the unbridled license of Rochester. Beauty is here, southern beauty, resplendent and harmonious, spread over everything, over the luminous sky, the calm scenery, corporal nudity, artlessness of heart. Is there a thing it does not deify? All sentiments are exalted under its hands. What was gross becomes noble; even in the nocturnal adventure in the seraglio, which seems worthy of Faublas, poetry embellishes licentiousness. The girls are lying in the large silent apartment, like precious flowers brought from all climates into a conservatory:

"One with her flush’d cheek laid on her white arm,  
And raven ringlets gather’d in dark crowd  
Above her brow, lay dreaming soft and warm; . . .  
One with her auburn tresses lightly bound,  
And fair brows gently drooping, as the fruit  
Nods from the tree, was slumbering with soft breath,  
And lips apart, which show’d the pearls beneath. . . .  
A fourth as marble, statue-like and still,  
Lay in a breathless, hush’d, and stony sleep;  
White, cold, and pure . . . a carved lady on a monument."

However, "the fading lamps waned, dim and blue;" Dudu is asleep, the innocent girl; and if she has cast a glance on her glass,

"'Twas like the fawn, which, in the lake display’d,  
Beholds her own shy, shadowy image pass,

1 Byron's Works, xvi.; Don Juan, c. vi. st. lxvi. lxviii.
When first she starts, and then returns to peep,
Admiring this new native of the deep.”

What will become now of Puritanic prudery? Can
the proprieties prevent beauty from being beautiful?
Will you condemn a picture of Titian for its nudity?
What gives value to human life, and nobility to human
nature, if not the power of attaining delicious and sublime
emotions? We have just had one—one worthy of a
painter; is it not worth that of an alderman? Shall
we refuse to acknowledge the divine because it appears
in art and enjoyment, and not only in conscience and
action? There is a world beside ours, and a civilisation
beside ours; our rules are narrow, and our pedantry
tyrannic; the human plant can be otherwise developed
than in our compartments and under our snows, and
the fruits it will then bear will not be less precious.
We must confess it, since we relish them when they
are offered to us. Who has read the love of Haidée,
and has had any other thought than to envy and pity
her? She is a wild child who has picked up Juan—
another child cast ashore senseless by the waves. She
has preserved him, nursed him like a mother, and now
she loves him: who can blame her for loving him?
Who, in presence of the splendid nature which smiles
on and protects them, can imagine for them anything
else than the all-powerful feeling which unites them:

“It was a wild and breaker-beaten coast,
With cliffs above, and a broad sandy shore,
Guarded by shoals and rocks as by an host, . . .
And rarely ceased the haughty billow's roar,
Save on the dead long summer days, which make
The outstretched ocean glitter like a lake . . .

1 Byron's Works, Don Juan, c. vi. st. ix.
And all was stillness, save the sea-bird's cry,
And dolphin's leap, and little billow crest
By some low rock or shelve, that made it fret
Against the boundary it scarcely wet. . .

And thus they wander'd forth, and hand in hand,
Over the shining pebbles and the shells,
Glided along the smooth and harden'd sand,
And in the worn and wild receptacles
Work'd by the storms, yet work'd as it were plann'd,
In hollow halls, with sparry roofs and cells,
They turn'd to rest; and, each clasp'd by an arm,
Yielded to the deep twilight's purple charm.

They look'd up to the sky whose floating glow
Spread like a rosy ocean, vast and bright;
They gazed upon the glittering sea below,
Whence the broad moon rose circling into sight;
They heard the wave's splash and the wind so low,
And saw each other's dark eyes darting light
Into each other—and, beholding this,
Their lips drew near, and clung into a kiss. . .

They were alone, but not alone as they
Who shut in chambers think it loneliness;
The silent ocean, and the starlight bay
The twilight glow, which momently grew less,
The voiceless sand, and dropping caves that lay
Around them, made them to each other press,
As if there were no life beneath the sky
Save theirs, and that their life could never die.”

An excellent opportunity to introduce here your formularies and catechisms:

"Haidée spoke not of scruples, ask'd no vows,
Nor offer'd any . . .

1 Byron's Works, xv.; Don Juan, c. ii. st. clxxvii–clxxxviii.
She was all which pure ignorance allows,
And flew to her young mate like a young bird.” ¹

Nature suddenly expands, for she is ripe, like a bud bursting into bloom, nature in her fulness, instinct, and heart:

“Alas! they were so young, so beautiful,
So lonely, loving helpless, and the hour
Was that in which the heart is always full,
And, having o’er itself no further power,
Prompts deeds eternity can not annul.” ² . . .

O admirable moralists, you stand before these two flowers like patented gardeners, holding in your hands a model of the bloom sanctioned by your society of horticulture, proving that the model has not been followed, and deciding that the two weeds must be cast into the fire, which you keep burning to consume irregular growths. You have judged well, and you know your art.

Besides British cant, there is universal hypocrisy; besides English pedantry, Byron wars against human roguery. Here is the general aim of the poem, and to this his character and genius tended. His great and gloomy dreams of juvenile imagination have vanished; experience has come; he knows man now; and what is man, once known? does the sublime abound in him? Do we think that the grand sentiments—those of Childe Harold, for instance,—are the ordinary course of life?³ The truth is, that man employs most of his time

¹ Byron’s Works, xv. ; Don Juan, c. ii. st. cxc.
² Ibid. c. ii. st. cxcii.
³ Byron says (v., Oct. 12, 1820), “Don Juan is too true, and would, I suspect, live longer than Childe Harold. The women hate many things which strip off the tinsel of sentiment.”
in sleeping, dining, yawning, working like a horse, amusing himself like an ape. According to Byron, he is an animal; except for a few minutes, his nerves, his blood, his instincts lead him. Routine works over it all, necessity whips him on, the animal advances. As the animal is proud, and moreover imaginative, it pretends to be marching for its own pleasure, that there is no whip, that at all events this whip rarely touches its flanks, that at least its stoic back can make-believe that it does not feel it. It thinks that it is decked with the most splendid trappings, and thus struts on with measured steps, fancying that it carries relics and treads on carpets and flowers, whilst in reality it tramples in the mud, and carries with it the stains and bad smells of every dunghill. What a pastime to touch its mangy back, to set before its eyes the sacks full of flower which it carries, and the goad which makes it go! What a pretty farce! It is the eternal farce; and not a sentiment thereof but provides him with an act: love in the first place. Certainly Donna Julia is very lovable, and Byron loves her; but she comes out of his hands, as rumpled as any other woman. She is virtuous, of course; and what is better still, she desires to be so. She plies herself, in connection with Don Juan, with the finest arguments; what a fine thing are arguments, and how suited they are to check passion! Nothing can be more solid than a firm purpose, propped up by logic, resting on the fear of the world, the thought of God, the recollection of duty; nothing can prevail against it, except a tête-à-tête in June, on a moonlight evening.

1 Don Juan, c. vii. st. 2. I hope it is no crime to laugh at all things. For I wish to know what, after all, are all things—but a show!
At last the deed is done, and the poor timid lady is surprised by her outraged husband; in what a situation! Let us look again at the book. Of course she will be speechless, ashamed and full of tears, and the moral reader duly reckons on her remorse. My dear reader, you have not reckoned on impulse and nerves. To-morrow she will feel shame; the business is now to overwhelm the husband, to deafen him, to confound him, to save Juan, to save herself, to fight. The war once begun, is waged with all kinds of weapons, and chiefly with audacity and insults. The only idea is the present need, and this absorbs all others; it is in this that woman is a woman. This Julia cries lustily. It is a regular storm: hard words and recriminations, mockery and challenges, fainting and tears. In a quarter of an hour she has gained twenty years' experience. You did not know, nor she either, what an actress can emerge, all on a sudden, unforeseen, out of a simple woman. Do you know what can emerge from yourself? You think yourself rational, humane; I admit it for to-day; you have dined, and you are comfortable in a pleasant room. Your human mechanism works without getting into disorder, because the wheels are oiled and well regulated; but place it in a shipwreck, a battle, let the failing or the plethora of blood for an instant derange the chief pieces, and we shall see you howling or drivelling like a madman or an idiot. Civilisation, education, reason, health, cloak us in their smooth and polished cases; let us tear them away one by one, or all together, and we laugh to see the brute, who is lying at the bottom. Here is our friend Juan reading Julia's last letter, and swearing in a transport never to forget the beautiful eyes which he caused to weep so
much. Was ever feeling more tender or sincere? But unfortunately Juan is at sea, and sickness sets in. He cries out:

"Sooner shall earth resolve itself to sea,
   Than I resign thine image, oh, my fair! . . .
(Here the ship gave a lurch, and he grew sea-sick.) . . .
Sooner shall heaven kiss earth—(here he fell sicker.)
Oh Julia! what is every other woe?
(For God's sake let me have a glass of liquor;
Pedro, Battista, help me down below).
Julia, my love!—(You rascal, Pedro, quicker)—
Oh, Julia!—(this curt vessel pitches so)
Beloved Julia, hear me still beseeching!
(Here he grew inarticulate with retching.) . . .
Love's a capricious power . . .
Against all noble maladies he's bold,
But vulgar illnesses don't like to meet, . . .
Shrinks from the application of hot towels,
And purgatives are dangerous to his reign,
Sea-sickness death."¹ . . .

Many other things cause the death of Love:

"'Tis melancholy, and a fearful sign
   Of human frailty, folly, also crime,
That love and marriage rarely can combine,
Although they both are born in the same clime;
Marriage from love, like vinegar from wine—
A sad, sour, sober beverage.² . . .
An honest gentleman, at his return,
May not have the good fortune of Ulysses; . . .
The odds are that he finds a handsome urn
To his memory—and two or three young misses
Born to some friend, who holds his wife and riches,—
And that his Argus bites him by—the breeches.”³
These are the words of a sceptic, even of a cynic. Sceptic and cynic, it is in this he ends. Sceptic through misanthropy, cynic through bravado, a sad and combative humour always impels him; southern voluptuousness has not conquered him; he is only an epicurean through contradiction and for a moment:

"Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter,
Sermons and soda-water the day after.
Man, being reasonable must get drunk;
The best of life is but intoxication." 1

We see clearly that he is always the same, going to extremes and unhappy, bent on destroying himself. His Don Juan, also, is a debauchery; in it he diverts himself outrageously at the expense of all respectable things, as a bull in a china shop. He is always violent, and often ferocious; a sombre imagination intersperses his love stories with horrors leisurely enjoyed, the despair and famine of shipwrecked men, and the emaciation of the raging skeletons feeding on each other. He laughs at it horribly, like Swift; he jests over it like Voltaire:

"And next they thought upon the master's mate,
As fatteret; but he saved himself, because,
Besides being much aversc from such a fate,
There were some other reasons: the first was,
He had been rather indisposed of late;
And that which chiefly proved his saving clause,
Was a small present made to him at Cadiz,
By general subscription of the ladies." 2

With his specimens in hand, 3 Byron follows with a surgeon's exactness all the stages of death, gorging, rage,

1 Byron's Works, xv.; Don Juan, c. ii. st. cxxxvii., cxxxix.
2 Ibid. c. ii. st. lxxxi.
3 Byron, had before him a dozen authentic descriptions.
madness, howling, exhaustion, stupor; he wishes to touch and exhibit the naked and ascertained truth, the last grotesque and hideous element of humanity. Let us read again the assault on Ismail,—the grape-shot and the bayonet, the street massacres, the corpses used as fascines, and the thirty-eight thousand slaughtered Turks. There is blood enough to satiate a tiger, and this blood flows amidst an accompaniment of jests; it is in order to rail at war, and the butcheries dignified with the name of exploits. In this pitiless and universal demolition of all human vanities, what remains? What do we know except that life is "a scene of all-confess'd inanity," and that men are,

"Dogs, or men!—for I flatter you in saying
That ye are dogs—your betters far—ye may
Read, or read not, what I am now essaying
To show ye what ye are in every way?"  

What does he find in science but deficiencies, and in religion but mummeries? Does he so much as preserve poetry? Of the divine mantle, the last garment which a poet respects, he makes a rag to trample upon, to wring, to make holes in, out of sheer wantonness. At the most touching moment of Haidée’s love he vents a buffoonery. He concludes an ode with caricatures. He is Faust in the first verse, and Mephistopheles in the second. He employs, in the midst of tenderness or of murder, penny-print witticisms, trivialities, gossip, with a pamphleteer’s vilification and a buffoon’s whimsicalities. He lays bare the poetic method, asks himself where he has got to, counts the stanzas already

1 Byron’s Works, xvi.; Don Juan, c. vii. st. 7.
2 See his Vision of Judgment
done, jokes the Muse, Pegasus, and the whole epic stud, as though he wouldn't give twopence for them. Again, what remains? Himself, he alone, standing amidst all this ruin. It is he who speaks here; his characters are but screens; half the time even he pushes them aside, to occupy the stage. He lavishes upon us his opinions, recollections, anger, tastes; his poem is a conversation, a confidence, with the ups and downs, the rudeness and freedom of a conversation and a confidence, almost like the holographic journal, in which, by night, at his writing-table, he opened his heart and discharged his feelings. Never was seen in such a clear glass the birth of lively thought, the tumult of great genius, the inner life of a genuine poet, always impassioned, inexhaustibly fertile and creative, in whom suddenly, successively, finished and adorned, bloomed all human emotions and ideas,—sad, gay, lofty, low, hustling one another, mutually impeding one another like swarms of insects who go humming and feeding on flowers and in the mud. He may say what he likes; willingly or unwillingly we listen to him; let him leap from sublime to burlesque, we leap with him. He has so much wit, so fresh a wit, so sudden, so biting, such a prodigality of knowledge, ideas, images picked up from the four corners of the horizon, in heaps and masses, that we are captivated, transported beyond all limits; we cannot dream of resisting. Too vigorous, and hence unbridled,—that is the word which ever recurs when we speak of Byron; too vigorous against others and himself, and so unbridled, that after spending his life in setting the world at defiance, and his poetry in depicting revolt, he can only find the fulfilment of his talent and the satisfaction of his heart, in a poem waging war
on all human and poetic conventions. When a man lives in such a manner he must be great, but he becomes also morbid. There is a malady of heart and mind in the style of Don Juan, as in Swift. When a man jests amidst his tears, it is because he has a poisoned imagination. This kind of laughter is a spasm, and we see in one man a hardening of the heart, or madness; in another, excitement or disgust. Byron was exhausted, at least the poet was exhausted in him. The last cantos of Don Juan drag: the gaiety became forced, the escapades became digressions; the reader began to be bored. A new kind of poetry, which he had attempted, had given way in his hands: in the drama he only attained to powerful declamation, his characters had no life; when he forsook poetry, poetry forsook him; he went to Greece in search of action, and only found death.

VI.

So lived and so died this unhappy great man; the malady of the age had no more distinguished prey. Around him, like a hecatomb, lie the others, wounded also by the greatness of their faculties and their immoderate desires,—some ending in stupor or drunkenness, others worn out by pleasure or work; these driven to madness or suicide; those beaten down by impotence, or lying on a sick-bed; all agitated by their too acute or aching nerves; the strongest carrying their bleeding wound to old age, the happiest having suffered as much as the rest, and preserving their scars, though healed. The concert of their lamentations has filled their century, and we stood around them, hearing in our hearts the low echo of their cries. We were sad like them, and like

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them inclined to revolt. The reign of democracy excited our ambitions without satisfying them; the proclamation of philosophy kindled our curiosity without satisfying it. In this wide-open career, the plebeian, suffered for his mediocrity, and the sceptic for his doubt. The plebeian, like the sceptic, attacked by a precocious melancholy, and withered by a premature experience, abandoned his sympathies and his conduct to the poets, who declared happiness impossible, truth unattainable, society ill-arranged, man abortive or marred. From this unison of voices an idea arose, the centre of the literature, the arts, the religion of the age, to wit that there is a monstrous disproportion between the different parts of our social structure, and that human destiny is vitiated by this disagreement.

What advice have they given us to cure this? They were great; were they wise? "Let deep and strong sensations rain upon you; if the human mechanism breaks, so much the worse!" "Cultivate your garden, bury yourself in a little circle, re-enter the flock, be a beast of burden." "Turn believer again, take holy water, abandon your mind to dogmas, and your conduct to manuals of devotion." "Make your way; aspire to power, honours, wealth." Such are the various replies of artists and citizens, Christians and men of the world. Are they replies? And what do they propose but to satiate one's self, to become stupid, to turn aside, to forget? There is another and a deeper answer, which Goethe was the first to give, the truth of which we begin to conceive, in which issue all the labours and experience of the age, and which may perhaps be the subject-matter of future literature: "Try to understand yourself, and things in general." A strange reply, which seems
hardly new, whose scope we shall only hereafter discover. For a long time yet men will feel their sympathies thrill at the sound of the sobs of their great poets. For a long time they will rage against a destiny which opens to their aspirations the career of limitless space, to shatter them, within two steps of the goal, against a wretched post which they had not seen. For a long time they will bear like fetters the necessities which they ought to have embraced as laws. Our generation, like the preceding, has been tainted by the malady of the age; and will never more than half get rid of it. We shall arrive at truth, not at tranquillity. All we can heal at present is our intellect; we have no hold upon our feelings. But we have a right to conceive for others the hopes which we no longer entertain for ourselves, and to prepare for our descendants the happiness which we shall never enjoy. Brought up in a more wholesome air, they will have, mayhap, a wholesomer heart. The reformation of ideas ends by reforming the rest, and the light of the mind produces serenity of heart. Hitherto, in our judgments on men, we have taken for our masters the oracles and poets, and like them we have received for undoubted truths the noble dreams of our imagination and the imperious suggestions of our heart. We have bound ourselves to the partiality of religious divinations, and the inexactness of literary divinations, and we have shaped our doctrines according to our instincts and our vexations. Science at last approaches, and approaches man; it has gone beyond the visible and palpable world of stars, stones, plants, amongst which man disdainfully confined her. It reaches the heart provided with exact and penetrating implements; whose justness has been proved, and their
reach measured by three hundred years of experience. Thought, with its development and rank, its structure and relations, its deep material roots, its infinite growth through history, its lofty bloom at the summit of things, becomes the object of science,—an object which, sixty years ago, it foresaw in Germany, and which, slowly and surely probed, by the same methods as the physical world, will be transformed before our eyes, as the physical world has been transformed. It is already being transformed, and we have left behind us the light in which Byron and the French poets had considered it. No, man is not an abortion or a monster; no, the business of poetry is not to disgust or defame him. He is in his place, and completes a chain. Let us watch him grow and increase, and we shall cease to rail at or curse him. He, like everything else, is a product, and as such it is right he should be what he is. His innate imperfection is in order, like the constant abortion of a stamen in a plant, like the fundamental irregularity of four facets in a crystal. What we took for a deformity, is a form; what seemed to us a subversion of a law, is the accomplishment of a law. Human reason and virtue have for their foundation instincts and animal images, as living forms have for their instruments physical laws, as organic matters have for their elements mineral substances. What wonder if virtue or human reason, like living form or organic matter, sometimes fails or decomposes, since like them, and like every superior and complex existence, they have for support and control inferior and simple forces, which, according to circumstances, now maintain it by their harmony, now mar it by their discord? What wonder if the elements of existence, like
those of quantity, receive, from their very nature, the immutable laws which constrain and reduce them to a certain species and order of formation? Who will rise up against geometry? Who, especially, will rise up against a living geometry? Who will not, on the contrary, feel moved with admiration at the sight of those grand powers which, situated at the heart of things, incessantly urge the blood through the limbs of the old world, disperse it quickly in the infinite network of arteries, and spread over the whole surface the eternal flower of youth and beauty? Who, finally, will not feel himself ennobled, when he finds that this pile of laws results in a regular series of forms, that matter has thought for its goal, that nature ends in reason, and that this ideal to which, amidst so many errors, all the aspirations of men cling, is also the end to which aim, amidst so many obstacles, all the forces of the universe? In this employment of science, and in this conception of things, there is a new art, a new morality, a new polity, a new religion, and it is in the present time our task to try and discover them.