EDGCUMBE RICHARD

BYRON: THE LAST PHASE

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Содержание

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PREFACE

This book has no pretensions; it is merely a record of events and impressions which nearly forty years of close study have accumulated. There seems to be a general agreement that the closing scenes of Byron's short life have not been adequately depicted by his biographers. From the time of Byron's departure from Ravenna, in the autumn of 1821, his disposition and conduct underwent a transformation so complete that it would have been difficult to recognize, in the genial, unselfish personality who played so effective a rôle at Missolonghi, the gloomy misanthrope of 1811, or the reckless libertine of the following decade.

The conduct of Byron in Greece seems to have come as a revelation to his contemporaries, and his direction of complex affairs, in peculiarly trying circumstances, certainly deserves more attention than it has received. Records made on the spot by men whose works are now, for the most part, out of print have greatly simplified my task, and I hope that the following pages may be acceptable to those who have not had an opportunity of studying that picturesque phase of Byron's career. I should have much preferred to preserve silence on the subject of his separation from his wife. Unfortunately, the late Lord Lovelace, in giving his sanction to the baseless and forgotten slanders of a bygone age, has recently assailed the memory of Byron's half-sister, and has set a mark of infamy upon her which cannot be erased without referring to matters which ought never to have been mentioned.

In order to traverse statements made in 'Astarte,' it was necessary to reveal an incident which, during Byron's lifetime, was known only by those who were pledged to silence. With fuller knowledge of things hidden from Byron's contemporaries, we may realize the cruelty of those futile persecutions to which Mrs. Leigh was subjected by Lady Byron and her advisers, under the impression that they could extract the confession of a crime which existed only in their prurient imaginations. Mrs. Leigh, in one of her letters to Hobhouse, says, 'I have made it a rule to be silent – that is to say, As Long As I Can.' Although the strain must have been almost insupportable she died with her secret unrevealed, and the mystery which Byron declared 'too simple to be easily found out' has hitherto remained unsolved. I regret being unable more precisely to indicate the source of information embodied in the concluding portions of this work. The reader may test the value of my statements by the light of citations which seem amply to confirm them. At all events, I claim to have shown by analogy that Lord Lovelace's accusation against Mrs. Leigh is groundless, and therefore his contention, that Byron's memoirs were destroyed *because they implicated Mrs. Leigh*, is absolutely untenable. Those memoirs were destroyed, as we now know, because both Hobhouse and Mrs. Leigh feared possible revelations concerning another person, whose feelings and interests formed the paramount consideration of those who were parties to the deed. Lord John Russell, who had read the memoirs, stated in 1869 that Mrs. Leigh was *not* implicated in them, a fact which proves that they were not burned for the purpose of shielding *her*.

Lord Lovelace tells us that Sir Walter Scott, who had heard full particulars from Thomas Moore, remarked, 'It is a pity, but there *was* a reason —*premat nox alta*.' Facts which they hoped deep oblivion would hide have come to the surface at last, and I deeply regret that circumstances should have imposed upon me a duty which is repugnant both to my inclination and instincts. After all is said, the blame rightly belongs to Lady Byron's grandson, who, heedless of consequences, stirred the depths of a muddy pool. He tells us, in 'Astarte,' (1) that the papers concerning Byron's marriage have been carefully preserved; (2) that they form *a complete record of all the causes of separation*; and (3) that they contain *full information on every part of the subject.*

In those circumstances it is strange that, with the whole of Lady Byron's papers before him, Lord Lovelace should have published only documents of secondary importance which do not prove his case. After saying, 'It should be distinctly understood that no misfortunes, blunders, or malpractices, have swept away Lady Byron's papers, or those belonging to the executors of Lord Byron,' he leaves the essential records to the imagination of his readers, and feeds us on hints and suggestions which are not borne out by extracts provided as samples of the rest. It is impossible not to suspect that Lord Lovelace, in arranging the papers committed to his charge, discarded some that would have told in favour of Mrs. Leigh, and selected others which colourably supported his peculiar views.

In matters of this kind everything depends upon the qualifications of the accuser and the reliability of the witness. Lord Lovelace in a dual capacity certainly evinced an active imagination.

As an example, 'Astarte,' which was designed to blast the fair fame of Mrs. Leigh, was used by him to insult the memory of the late Mr. Murray (who he admits showed him many acts of kindness), and to repudiate promises which he undoubtedly made, to edit his grandfather's works. Rambling statements are made with design to discredit both Mr. Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly*, and Mr. Murray, the friend of Lord Byron. Even personal defects are dragged in to prejudice the reader and embitter the venom of irrelevant abuse. It was as if Plutarch, in order to enhance the glory of Antony, had named 'the Last of the Romans' Cassius the Short-sighted. Fortunately, written proofs were in existence to controvert Lord Lovelace's assertions – proofs which were used with crushing effect – otherwise Mr. Murray might have found himself in a position quite as helpless as that of poor Mrs. Leigh herself. So unscrupulous a use of documents in that case suggests the possibility that a similar process may have been adopted in reference to Mrs. Leigh. It is indeed unfortunate that Lady Byron's papers cannot be inspected by some unprejudiced person, for we have nothing at present beyond Lord Lovelace's vague assertions. Were those papers thoroughly sifted they would surely acquit Mrs. Leigh of the crime that has been so cruelly laid to her charge. Meanwhile I venture to think that the following pages help to clear the air of much of that mystery which surrounds the lives of Lord Byron and his sister.

In conclusion, I desire to record my personal obligation to the latest edition of the 'Poems,' editvvved by Mr. Ernest Hartley Coleridge; and of the 'Letters and Journals,' edited by Mr. Rowland Prothero, volumes which together form the most comprehensive and scholarly record of Byron's life and poetry that has ever been issued.

R. E.

August, 1909.

PART I

'… Le cose ti fien conte,
Quando noi fermerem li nostri passi
Sulla trista riviera d' Acheronte.'

Inferno, Canto III., 76-78.

CHAPTER I

'A large disagreeable city, almost without inhabitants' – such was the poet Shelley's description of Pisa in 1821. The Arno was yellow and muddy, the streets were empty, and there was altogether an air of poverty and wretchedness in the town. The convicts, who were very numerous, worked in the streets in gangs, cleaning and sweeping them. They were dressed in red, and were chained together by the leg in pairs. All day long one heard the slow clanking of their chains, and the rumbling of the carts they were forced to drag from place to place like so many beasts of burden. A spectator could not but be struck by the appearance of helpless misery stamped on their yellow cheeks and emaciated forms.

On the Lung' Arno Mediceo, east of the Ponte di Mezzo, stands the Palazzo Lanfranchi, which is supposed to have been built by Michael Angelo. Here, on November 2, 1821, Lord Byron arrived, with his servants, his horses, his monkey, bulldog, mastiff, cats, peafowl, hens, and other live stock, which he had brought with him from Ravenna. In another quarter of the city resided Count Rugiero Gamba, his son Pietro, and his daughter Countess Teresa Guiccioli. On the other side of the Arno, nearly opposite to Byron's residence, lived the poet Shelley, with his wife and their friends Edward and Jane Williams.

In the middle of November, Captain Thomas Medwin, a relative of Shelley's, arrived at Pisa; and on January 14, 1822, came Edward John Trelawny, who was destined to play so important a part in the last scenes of the lives of both Shelley and Byron.

Byron was at this time in his thirty-third year. Medwin thus describes his personal appearance:

> 'I saw a man of about five feet seven or eight, apparently forty years of age. As was said of Milton, Lord Byron barely escaped being short and thick. His face was fine, and the lower part symmetrically moulded; for the lips and chin had that curved and definite outline that distinguishes Grecian beauty. His forehead was high, and his temples broad; and he had a paleness in his complexion almost to wanness. His hair, thin and fine, had almost become grey, and waved in natural and graceful curls over his head, that was assimilating itself fast to the "bald first Cæsar's." He allowed it to grow longer behind than it is accustomed to be worn, and at that time had mustachios which were not sufficiently dark to be becoming. In criticizing his features, it might, perhaps, be said that his eyes were placed too near his nose, and that one was rather smaller than the other. They were of a greyish-brown, but of a peculiar clearness, and when animated possessed a fire which seemed to look through and penetrate the thoughts of others, while they marked the inspirations of his own. His teeth were small, regular, and white. I expected to discover that he had a club-foot; but it would have been difficult to have distinguished one from the other, either in size or in form. On the whole, his figure was manly, and his countenance handsome and prepossessing, and very expressive. The familiar ease of his conversation soon made me perfectly at home in his society.'

Trelawny's description is as follows:

> 'In external appearance Byron realized that ideal standard with which imagination adorns genius. He was in the prime of life, thirty-four; of middle height, five feet eight and a half inches; regular features, without a stain or furrow on his pallid skin; his shoulders broad, chest open, body and limbs finely proportioned. His small highly-finished head and curly hair had an airy and graceful appearance from the massiveness and length of his throat; you saw his genius in his eyes and lips.'

Trelawny could find no peculiarity in his dress, which was adapted to the climate. Byron wore:

> 'a tartan jacket braided – he said it was the Gordon pattern, and that his mother was of that race – a blue velvet cap with a gold band, and very loose nankin trousers, strapped down so as to cover his feet. His throat was not bare, as represented in drawings.'

Lady Blessington, who first saw Byron in April of the following year, thus describes him:

> 'The impression of the first few minutes disappointed me, as I had, both from the portraits and descriptions given, conceived a different idea of him. I had fancied him taller, with a more dignified and commanding air; and I looked in vain for the hero-looking sort of person, with whom I had so long identified him in imagination. His appearance is, however, highly prepossessing. His head is finely shaped, and his forehead open, high, and noble; his eyes are grey and full of expression, but one is visibly larger than the other. The nose is large and well shaped, but, from being a little *too thick*, it looks better in profile than in front-face; his mouth is the most remarkable feature in his face, the upper lip of Grecian shortness, and the corners descending; the lips full, and finely cut.
>
> 'In speaking, he shows his teeth very much, and they are white and even; but I observed that even in his smile – and he smiles frequently – there is something of a scornful expression in his mouth, that is evidently natural, and not, as many suppose, affected. This particularly struck me. His chin is large and well shaped, and finishes well the oval of his face. He is extremely thin – indeed, so much so that his figure has almost a boyish air. His face is peculiarly pale, but not the paleness of ill-health, as its character is that of fairness, the fairness of a dark-haired person; and his hair (which is getting rapidly grey) is of a very dark brown, and curls naturally: he uses a good deal of oil in it, which makes it look still darker. His countenance is full of expression, and changes with the subject of conversation; it gains on the beholder the more it is seen, and leaves an agreeable impression… His whole appearance is remarkably gentlemanlike, and he owes nothing of this to his toilet, as his coat appears to have been many years made, is much too large – and all his garments convey the idea of having been purchased ready-made, so ill do they fit him. There is a *gaucherie* in his movements, which evidently proceeds from the perpetual consciousness of his lameness, that appears to haunt him; for he tries to conceal his foot when seated, and when walking has a nervous rapidity in his manner. He is very slightly lame, and the deformity of his foot is so little remarkable, that I am not now aware which foot it is.
>
> 'His voice and accent are peculiarly agreeable, but effeminate – clear, harmonious, and so distinct, that though his general tone in speaking is rather low than high, not a word is lost. His manners are as unlike my preconceived notions of them as is his appearance. I had expected to find him a dignified, cold, reserved, and haughty person, but nothing can be more different; for were I to point out the prominent defect of Lord Byron, I should say it was flippancy, and a total want of that natural self-possession and dignity, which ought to characterize a man of birth and education.'

Medwin tells us, in his 'Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron,' that Byron's voice had a flexibility, a variety in its tones, a power and pathos, beyond any he ever heard; and his countenance was capable of expressing the tenderest as well as the strongest emotions, which would perhaps have made him the finest actor in the world.

The Countess Guiccioli, who had a longer acquaintance with Byron than any of those who have attempted to portray him, says:

> 'Lord Byron's eyes, though of a light grey, were capable of all extremes of expression, from the most joyous hilarity to the deepest sadness, from the very sunshine of benevolence to the most concentrated scorn or rage. But it was in the mouth and chin that the great beauty as well as expression of his fine countenance lay. His head was remarkably small, so much so as to be rather out of proportion to his face. The forehead, though a little too narrow, was high, and appeared more so from his having his hair (to preserve it, as he said) shaved over the temples. Still, the glossy dark brown curls, clustering over his head, gave the finish to its beauty. When to this is added that his nose, though handsomely, was rather thickly shaped, that his teeth were white and regular, and his complexion colourless, as good an idea, perhaps, as it is in the power of mere words to convey may be conceived of his features. In height he was five feet eight inches and a half. His hands were very white, and, according to his own notions of the size of hands as indicating birth, aristocratically small… No defect existed in the formation of his limbs; his slight infirmity was nothing but the result of weakness of one of his ankles. His habit of ever being on horseback had brought on the emaciation of his legs, as evinced by the post-mortem examination; the best proof of this is the testimony of William Swift, bootmaker at Southwell, who had the honour of working for Lord Byron from 1805 to 1807.'

It appears that Mrs. Wildman (the widow of the Colonel who had bought Newstead from Byron) not long before her death presented to the Naturalist Society of Nottingham several objects which had belonged to Lord Byron, and amongst others his boot and shoe trees. These trees are about nine inches long, narrow, and generally of a symmetrical form. They were accompanied by the following statement:

> 'William Swift, bootmaker at Southwell, Nottinghamshire, having had the honour of working for Lord Byron when residing at Southwell from 1805 to 1807, asserts that these were the trees upon which his lordship's boots and shoes were made, and that the last pair delivered was on the 10th May, 1807. He moreover affirms that his lordship had not a club foot, as has been said, but that both his feet were equally well formed, one, however, being an inch and a half shorter than the other.[1] The defect was not in the foot, but in the ankle, which, being weak, caused the foot to turn out too much. To remedy this, his lordship wore a very light and thin boot, which was tightly laced just under the sole, and, when a boy, he was made to wear a piece of iron with a joint at the ankle, which passed behind the leg and was tied behind the shoe. The calf of this leg was weaker than the other, and it was the left leg.
>
> '(Signed) William Swift.'
>
> 'This, then,' says Countess Guiccioli, 'is the extent of the defect of which so much has been said, and which has been called a deformity. As to its being visible, all those who knew him assert that it was so little evident, that it was even impossible to discover in which of the legs or feet the fault existed.'

Byron's alleged sensitiveness on the subject of his lameness seems to have been exaggerated.

> 'When he did show it,' continues Countess Guiccioli, 'which was never but to a very modest extent, it was only because, physically speaking, he suffered from it. Under the sole of the weak foot he at times experienced a painful sensation,

[1] Medwin, in his book 'The Angler in Wales,' vol. ii., p. 211, says: 'The *right* foot, as everyone knows, being twisted inwards, so as to amount to what is generally known as a club-foot.'

> especially after long walks. Once, at Genoa, Byron walked down the hill from Albaro to the seashore with me by a rugged and rough path. When we had reached the shore he was very well and lively. But it was an exceedingly hot day, and the return home fatigued him greatly. When home, I told him that I thought he looked ill. "Yes," said he, "I suffer greatly from my foot; it can hardly be conceived how much I suffer at times from that pain;" and he continued to speak to me about this defect with great simplicity and indifference.'

We have been particular to set before the reader the impression which Byron's personal appearance made upon those who saw him at this time, because none of the busts or portraits seem to convey anything like an accurate semblance of this extraordinary personality. Had the reader seen Byron in his various moods, he would doubtless have exclaimed, with Sir Walter Scott, that 'no picture is like him.'

The portrait by Saunders represents Byron with thick lips, whereas 'his lips were harmoniously perfect,' says Countess Guiccioli. Holmes almost gives him a large instead of his well-proportioned head. In Phillips's picture the expression is one of haughtiness and affected dignity, which Countess Guiccioli assures us was never visible to those who saw him in life. The worst portrait of Lord Byron, according to Countess Guiccioli, and which surpasses all others in ugliness, was done by Mr. West, an American, 'an excellent man, but a very bad painter.' This portrait, which some of Byron's American admirers requested to have taken, and which Byron consented to sit for, was begun at Montenero, near Leghorn. Byron seems only to have sat two or three times for it, and it was finished from memory. Countess Guiccioli describes it as 'a frightful caricature, which his family or friends ought to destroy.' As regards busts, she says:

> 'Thorwaldsen alone has, in his marble bust of Byron, been able to blend the regular beauty of his features with the sublime expression of his countenance.'

On January 22, 1822, Byron's mother-in-law, Lady Noel, died at the age of seventy.

> 'I am distressed for poor Lady Byron,' said the poet to Medwin: 'she must be in great affliction, for she adored her mother! The world will think that I am pleased at this event, but they are much mistaken. I never wished for an accession of fortune; I have enough without the Wentworth property. I have written a letter of condolence to Lady Byron – you may suppose in the kindest terms. If we are not reconciled, it is not my fault.'

There is no trace of this letter, and it is ignored by Lord Lovelace in 'Astarte.' It may be well here to point out how erroneous was the belief that Miss Milbanke was an heiress. Byron on his marriage settled £60,000 on his wife, and Miss Milbanke was to have brought £20,000 into settlement; but the money was not paid. Sir Ralph Milbanke's property was at that time heavily encumbered. Miss Milbanke had some expectations through her mother and her uncle, Lord Wentworth; but those prospects were not mentioned in the settlements. Both Lord Wentworth and Sir Ralph Milbanke were free to leave their money as they chose. When Lord Wentworth died, in April 1815, he left his property to Lady Milbanke for her life, and at her death to her daughter, Lady Byron. Therefore, at Lady Noel's death Byron inherited the whole property by right of his wife. But one of the terms of the separation provided that this property should be divided by arbitrators. Lord Dacre was arbitrator for Lady Byron, and Sir F. Burdett for Byron. Under this arrangement half the income was allotted to the wife and half to the husband. In the *London Gazette* dated 'Whitehall, March 2, 1822,' royal licence is given to Lord Byron and his wife that they may 'take and use the surname of Noel only, and also bear the arms of Noel only; and that the said George Gordon, Baron Byron, may subscribe the said surname of Noel before all titles of honour.' Henceforward the poet signed all his letters either with the initials N. B. or with 'Noel Byron' in full.

Byron was at this time in excellent health and spirits, and the society of the Shelleys made life unusually pleasant to him. Ravenna, with its gloomy forebodings, its limited social intercourse, to say nothing of its proscriptions – for nearly all Byron's friends had been exiled – was a thing of the past. The last phase had dawned, and Byron was about to show another side of his character. Medwin tells us that Byron's disposition was eminently sociable, however great the pains which he took to hide it from the world. On Wednesdays there was always a dinner at the Palazzo Lanfranchi, to which the *convives* were cordially welcomed. When alone Byron's table was frugal, not to say abstemious. But on these occasions every sort of wine, every luxury of the season, and every English delicacy, were displayed. Medwin says he never knew any man do the honours of his house with greater kindness and hospitality. On one occasion, after dinner, the conversation turned on the lyrical poetry of the day, and a question arose as to which was the most perfect ode that had been produced. Shelley contended for Coleridge's on Switzerland beginning, 'Ye clouds,' etc.; others named some of Moore's 'Irish Melodies' and Campbell's 'Hohenlinden'; and, had Lord Byron not been present, his own Invocation to Manfred, or Ode to Napoleon, or on Prometheus, might have been cited. 'Like Gray,' said Byron, 'Campbell smells too much of the oil: he is never satisfied with what he does; his finest things have been spoiled by over-polish – the sharpness of the outline is worn off. Like paintings, poems may be too highly finished. The great art is effect, no matter how produced.'

And then, rising from the table, he left the room, and presently returned with a magazine, from which he read 'The Burial of Sir John Moore' with the deepest feeling. It was at that time generally believed that Byron was the author of these admirable stanzas; and Medwin says: 'I am corroborated in this opinion lately (1824) by a lady, whose brother received them many years ago from Lord Byron, in his lordship's own handwriting.'

These festive gatherings were not pleasing to Shelley, who, with his abstemious tastes and modest, retiring disposition, disliked the glare and surfeit of it all. But Shelley's unselfish nature overcame his antipathy, and for the sake of others he sacrificed himself. In writing to his friend Horace Smith, he marks his repugnance for these dinners, 'when my nerves are generally shaken to pieces by sitting up, contemplating the rest of the company making themselves vats of claret, etc., till three o'clock in the morning.' Nevertheless, companionship with Byron seemed for a time, to Shelley and Mary, to be like 'companionship with a demiurge who could create rolling worlds at pleasure in the void of space.' Shelley's admiration for the poetic achievements of Byron is well known:

> 'Space wondered less at the swift and fair creations of God when he grew weary of vacancy, than I at the late works of this spirit of an angel in the mortal paradise of a decaying body. So I think – let the world envy, while it admires as it may.'[2]
>
> And again: 'What think you of Lord Byron's last volume? In my opinion it contains finer poetry than has appeared in England since the publication of "Paradise Regained." "Cain" is apocalyptic; it is a revelation not before communicated to man.'

Byron recognized Shelley's frankness, courage, and hardihood of opinion, but was not influenced by him so much as was at that time supposed by his friends in England. In writing to Horace Smith (April 11, 1822), Shelley begs him to assure Moore that he had not the smallest influence over Byron's religious opinions.

> 'If I had, I certainly should employ it to eradicate from his great mind the delusions of Christianity, which, in spite of his reason, seem perpetually to recur, and to lay in ambush for the hours of sickness and distress. "Cain" was *conceived* many years ago, and begun before I saw him last year at Ravenna. How happy should

[2] Letter to Mr. Gisborne, January 12, 1822. Professor Dowden's 'Life of Shelley,' vol. ii., p. 447.

> I not be to attribute to myself, however indirectly, any participation in that immortal work!'

'Byron,' says Professor Dowden in his 'Life of Shelley,' 'on his own part protested that his *dramatis personæ* uttered their own opinions and sentiments, not his.'

Byron undoubtedly had a deep-seated reverence for religion, and had a strong leaning towards the Roman Catholic doctrines. Writing to Moore (March 4, 1822), he says:

> 'I am no enemy to religion, but the contrary. As a proof, I am educating my natural daughter a strict Catholic in a convent of Romagna; for I think people can never have *enough* of religion, if they are to have any… As to poor Shelley, who is another bug-bear to you and the world, he is, to my knowledge, the *least* selfish and the mildest of men – a man who has made more sacrifices of his fortune and feelings for others than any I ever heard of. With his speculative opinions I have nothing in common, nor desire to have.'

Countess Guiccioli, a woman of no ordinary intuitive perceptions, with ample opportunities for judging the characters of both Shelley and Byron, makes a clear statement on this point:

> 'In Shelley's heart the dominant wish was to see society entirely reorganized. The sight of human miseries and infirmities distressed him to the greatest degree; but, too modest himself to believe that he was called upon to take the initiative, and inaugurate a new era of good government and fresh laws for the benefit of humanity, he would have been pleased to see such a genius as Byron take the initiative in this undertaking. Shelley therefore did his best to influence Byron. But the latter hated discussions. He could not bear entering into philosophical speculation at times when his soul craved the consolations of friendship, and his mind a little rest. He was quite insensible to reasonings, which often appear sublime because they are clothed in words incomprehensible to those who have not sought to understand their meaning. But he made an exception in favour of Shelley. He knew that he could not shake his faith in a doctrine founded upon illusions, by his incredulity; but he listened to him with pleasure, not only on account of Shelley's good faith and sincerity, but also because he argued upon false data, with such talent and originality, that he was both interested and amused. Lord Byron had examined every form of philosophy by the light of common sense, and by the instinct of his genius. Pantheism in particular was odious to him. He drew no distinction between absolute Pantheism which mixes up that which is infinite with that which is finite, and that form of Pantheism which struggles in vain to keep clear of Atheism. Shelley's views, clothed in a veil of spiritualism, were the most likely to interest Byron, but they did not fix him. Byron could never consent to lose his individuality, deny his own freedom of will, or abandon the hope of a future existence. As a matter of fact, Byron attributed all Shelley's views to the aberrations of a mind which is happier when it dreams than when it denies.'

'Shelley appears to me to be mad with his metaphysics,' said Byron on one occasion to Count Gamba. 'What trash in all these systems! say what they will, mystery for mystery, I still find that of the Creation the most reasonable of any.'

Thus it will be seen that the opinions of Lord Byron on matters of religion were far more catholic than those of his friend Shelley, who could not have influenced Byron in the manner generally supposed. That a change came over the spirit of Byron's poetry after meeting Shelley on the Lake of Geneva is unquestionable; but the surface of the waters may be roughened by a breeze without

disturbing the depths below. Like all true poets, Byron was highly susceptible to passing influences, and there can be no doubt that Shelley impressed him deeply.

The evident sincerity in the life and doctrines of Shelley – his unworldliness; the manner in which he had been treated by the world, and even by his own family, aroused the sympathy of Byron, at a time when he himself was for a different cause smarting under somewhat similar treatment. Although Byron and Shelley differed fundamentally on some subjects they concurred in the principles of others. Byron had no fixed religious opinions – that was the string upon which Shelley played – but there is a wide difference between doubt and denial. Gamba, after Byron's death, wrote thus to Dr. Kennedy:

> 'My belief is that Byron's religious opinions were not fixed. I mean that he was not more inclined towards one than towards another of the Christian sects; but that his feelings were thoroughly religious, and that he entertained the highest respect for the doctrines of Christ, which he considered to be the source of virtue and of goodness. As for the incomprehensible mysteries of religion, his mind floated in doubts which he wished most earnestly to dispel, as they oppressed him, and that is why he never avoided a conversation on the subject, as you are well aware. I have often had an opportunity of observing him at times when the soul involuntarily expresses its most sincere convictions; in the midst of dangers, both at sea and on land; in the quiet contemplation of a calm and beautiful night, in the deepest solitude. On these occasions I remarked that Lord Byron's thoughts were always imbued with a religious sentiment. The first time I ever had a conversation with him on that subject was at Ravenna, my native place, a little more than four years ago. We were riding together in the Pineta on a beautiful spring day. "How," said Byron, "when we raise our eyes to heaven, or direct them to the earth, can we doubt of the existence of God? or how, turning them inwards, can we doubt that there is something within us, more noble and more durable than the clay of which we are formed? Those who do not hear, or are unwilling to listen to these feelings, must necessarily be of a vile nature." I answered him with all those reasons which the superficial philosophy of Helvetius, his disciples and his masters, have taught. Byron replied with very strong arguments and profound eloquence, and I perceived that obstinate contradiction on this subject, which forced him to reason upon it, gave him pain. This incident made a deep impression upon me… Last year, at Genoa, when we were preparing for our journey to Greece, Byron used to converse with me alone for two or three hours every evening, seated on the terrace of his residence at Albaro in the fine evenings of spring, whence there opened a magnificent view of the superb city and the adjoining sea. Our conversation turned almost always on Greece, for which we were so soon to depart, or on religious subjects. In various ways I heard him confirm the sentiments which I have already mentioned to you. "Why, then," said I to him, "have you earned for yourself the name of impious, and enemy of all religious belief, from your writings?" He answered, "They are not understood, and are wrongly interpreted by the malevolent. My object is only to combat hypocrisy, which I abhor in everything, and particularly in religion, and which now unfortunately appears to me to be prevalent, and for this alone do those to whom you allude wish to render me odious, and make me out worse than I am.'"

We have quoted only a portion of Pietro Gamba's letter, but sufficient to show that Byron has been, like his friend Shelley, 'brutally misunderstood.' There was no one better qualified than Count Gamba to express an opinion on the subject, for he was in the closest intimacy with Byron up to the time of the latter's death. There was no attempt on Byron's part to mystify his young friend, who had

no epistolary intercourse with those credulous people in England whom Byron so loved to 'gull.' The desire to blacken his own character was reserved for those occasions when, as he well knew, there would be most publicity. Trelawny says:

> 'Byron's intimates smiled at his vaunting of his vices, but comparative strangers stared, and noted his sayings to retail to their friends, and that is the way many scandals got abroad.'

According to the same authority, George IV. made the sport known as 'equivocation' the fashion; the men about town were ashamed of being thought virtuous, and bragged of their profligacy. 'In company,' says Trelawny, 'Byron talked in Don Juan's vein; with a companion with whom he was familiar, he thought aloud.'

Among the accusations made against Byron by those who knew him least was that of intemperance – intemperance not in meat and drink only, but in everything. It must be admitted that Byron was to blame for this; he vaunted his propensity for the bottle, and even attributed his poetic inspirations to its aid. Trelawny, who had observed him closely, says:

> 'Of all his vauntings, it was, luckily for him, the emptiest. From all that I heard or witnessed of his habits abroad, he was and had been exceedingly abstemious in eating and drinking. When alone, he drank a glass or two of small claret or hock, and when utterly exhausted at night, a single glass of grog; which, when I mixed it for him, I lowered to what sailors call "water bewitched," and he never made any remark. I once, to try him, omitted the alcohol; he then said, "Tre, have you not forgotten the creature comfort?" I then put in two spoonfuls, and he was satisfied. This does not look like an habitual toper. Byron had not damaged his body by strong drinks, but his terror of getting fat was so great that he reduced his diet to the point of absolute starvation. He was the only human being I ever met with who had sufficient self-restraint and resolution to resist this proneness to fatten. He did so; and at Genoa, where he was last weighed, he was ten stone and nine pounds, and looked much less. This was not from vanity of his personal appearance, but from a better motive, and, as he was always hungry, his merit was the greater. Whenever he relaxed his vigilance he swelled apace. He would exist on biscuits and soda-water for days together; then, to allay the eternal hunger gnawing at his vitals, he would make up a horrid mess of cold potatoes, rice, fish, or greens, deluged in vinegar, and swallow it like a famished dog. Either of these unsavoury dishes, with a biscuit and a glass or two of Rhine wine, he cared not how sour, he called feasting sumptuously. Byron was of that soft, lymphatic temperament which it is almost impossible to keep within a moderate compass, particularly as in his case his lameness prevented his taking exercise. When he added to his weight, even standing was painful, so he resolved to keep down to eleven stone.'

While on this subject, it is not uninteresting to contrast the effects of Byron's regimen of abstinence by the light of a record kept by the celebrated wine-merchants, Messrs. Berry, of St. James's Street. This register of weights has been kept on their premises for the convenience of their customers since 1765, and contains over twenty thousand names. The following extract was made by the present writer on November 2, 1897:[3]

[3] 'Lord Byron.'

Date.	Stone.	lbs.	Age.
January 4, 1806 (boots, no hat)	13	12	18
July 8, 1807 (shoes)	10	13	19
July 23, 1807 (shoes, no hat)	11	0	19
August 13, 1807 (shoes, no hat)	10	11½	19
January 13, 1808 (see Moore's 'Life')	10	7	20
May 27, 1808 (Messrs. Berry)	11	1	—
June 10, 1809 (Messrs. Berry)	11	5¾	21
July 15, 1811 (Messrs. Berry)	9	11½	23
(*Circa*) June, 1823 (see Trelawny)	10	9	35

It will be seen at a glance that between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five Byron had reduced his weight by three stone and three pounds. The fluctuations between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five are not remarkable. This record marks the consistency of a heroic self-denial under what must often have been a strong temptation to appease the pangs of hunger.

CHAPTER II

Byron's life at Pisa, as afterwards at Genoa, was what most people would call a humdrum, dull existence. He rose late.

> 'Billiards, conversation, or reading, filled up the intervals,' says Medwin, 'till it was time to take our evening drive, ride, and pistol-practice. On our return, which was always in the same direction, we frequently met the Countess Guiccioli, with whom he stopped to converse a few minutes. He dined at half an hour after sunset, then drove to Count Gamba's, the Countess Guiccioli's father, passed several hours in their society, returned to his palace, and either read or wrote till two or three in the morning; occasionally drinking spirits diluted with water as a medicine, from a dread of a nephritic complaint, to which he was, or fancied himself, subject.'

On Sunday, March 24, 1822, while Byron, Shelley, Trelawny, Captain Hay, Count Pietro Gamba, and an Irish gentleman named Taaffe, were returning from their evening ride, and had nearly reached the Porta alle Piagge at the eastern end of the Lung' Arno, Sergeant-Major Masi, belonging to a dragoon regiment, being apparently in a great hurry to get back to barracks, pushed his way unceremoniously through the group of riders in front of him, and somewhat severely jostled Mr. Taaffe. This gentleman appealed to Byron, and the latter demanded an apology from the sergeant, whom he at first mistook for an officer. The sergeant lost his temper, and called out the guard at the gateway. Byron and Gamba dashed through, however, and before the others could follow there was some 'dom'd cutting and slashing'; Shelley was knocked off his horse, and Captain Hay received a wound in his face. Masi in alarm fled, and on the Lung' Arno met Byron returning to the scene of the fray: an altercation took place, and one of Byron's servants, who thought that Masi had wounded his master, struck at him with a pitchfork, and tumbled the poor fellow off his horse. There was a tremendous hubbub about this, and the legal proceedings which followed occupied two months, with much bluster, false swearing, and injustice, as a natural consequence. The court eventually came to the conclusion that there was no evidence for criminal proceedings against any of Byron's domestics, but, in consideration of Giovanni Battista Falcieri – one of Byron's servants – having a black beard, he was condemned to be escorted by the police to the frontier and banished from the grand-duchy of Tuscany.

At the same time the Gambas (who had nothing whatever to do with the affair) were told that their presence at Pisa was disagreeable to the Government. In consequence of the hint, Byron and the Gambas hired the Villa Dupuy, at Montenero, near Leghorn. Here, on June 28, 1822, a scuffle took place in the gardens of the villa between the servants of Count Gamba and of Byron, in which Byron's coachman and his cook took part. Knives were drawn as usual. Byron appeared on the balcony with his pistols, and threatened to shoot the whole party if they did not drop their knives, and the police had to be called in to quell the disturbance. The Government, who were anxious to be rid of Byron, took advantage of this riot at the Villa Dupuy. Byron's courier and Gamba's valet were sent over the frontier of the grand-duchy under police escort, and the Gambas were warned that, unless they left the country within three days, formal sentence of banishment would be passed upon them. As soon as Byron heard the news, he wrote a letter to the Governor of Leghorn, and asked for a respite for his friends. A few days grace were granted to the Gambas, and on July 8 they took passports for Genoa, intending to go first to the Baths of Lucca, where they hoped to obtain permission to return to Pisa. While negotiations were proceeding Byron returned to the Palazzo Lanfranchi.[4]

[4] 'Letters and Journals of Lord Byron,' edited by Rowland Prothero, vol. vi., appendix iii.

On April 20, 1822, there died at Bagnacavallo, not far from Ravenna, Byron's natural daughter Allegra, whose mother, Claire Clairmont, had joined the Shelleys at Pisa five days previously. The whole story is a sad one, and shall be impartially given in these pages.

When Shelley left Ravenna in August, 1821, he understood that Byron had determined that Allegra should not be left behind, alone and friendless, in the Convent of Bagnacavallo, and Shelley hoped that an arrangement would be made by which Claire might have the happiness of seeing her child once more. When Byron arrived at Pisa in November, and Allegra was not with him, Claire Clairmont's anxiety was so great that she wrote twice to Byron, protesting against leaving her child in so unhealthy a place, and entreated him to place Allegra with some respectable family in Pisa, or Florance, or Lucca. She promised not to go near the child, if such was his wish, nor should Mary or Shelley do so without Byron's consent. Byron, it appears, took no notice of these letters. The Shelleys, while strongly of opinion that Allegra should in some way be taken out of Byron's hands, thought it prudent to temporize and watch for a favourable opportunity. Claire held wild schemes for carrying off the child, schemes which were under the circumstances impolitic, even if practicable. Both Mary and Shelley did their utmost to dissuade Claire from any violent attempts, and Mary, in a letter written at this time, assures Claire that her anxiety for Allegra's health was to a great degree unfounded. After carefully considering the affair she had come to the conclusion that Allegra was well taken care of by the nuns in the convent, that she was in good health, and would in all probability continue so.

On April 15 Claire Clairmont arrived at Pisa on a visit to the Shelleys, and a few days later started with the Williamses for Spezzia, to search for houses on the bay. Professor Dowden says:[5]

> 'They cannot have been many hours on their journey, when Shelley and Mary received tidings of sorrowful import, which Mary chronicles in her journal with the words "Evil news." Allegra was dead. Typhus fever had raged in the Romagna, but no one wrote to inform her parents with the fact.'

Lord Byron felt the loss bitterly at first.

> 'His conduct towards this child,' says Countess Guiccioli, 'was always that of a fond father. He was dreadfully agitated by the first intelligence of her illness; and when afterwards that of her death arrived, I was obliged to fulfil the melancholy task of communicating it to him. The memory of that frightful moment is stamped indelibly on my mind. A mortal paleness spread itself over his face, his strength failed him, and he sank into a seat. His look was fixed, and the expression such that I began to fear for his reason; he did not shed a tear; and his countenance manifested so hopeless, so profound, so sublime a sorrow, that at the moment he appeared a being of a nature superior to humanity. He remained immovable in the same attitude for an hour, and no consolation which I endeavoured to afford him seemed to reach his ears, far less his heart.'

Writing to Shelley on April 23, 1822, Byron says:

> 'I do not know that I have anything to reproach in my conduct, and certainly nothing in my feelings and intentions towards the dead. But it is a moment when we are apt to think that, if this or that had been done, such events might have been prevented, though every day and hour shows us that they are the most natural and inevitable. I suppose that Time will do his usual work. Death has done his.'

Whatever may be thought of Byron's conduct in the matter of Miss Claire Clairmont – conduct which Allegra's mother invariably painted in the darkest colours – the fact remains as clear as day, that Byron always behaved well and kindly towards the poor little child whose death gave him such

[5] 'Life of Shelley,' vol. ii., p. 494.

intense pain. The evidence of the Hoppners at Venice, of Countess Guiccioli at Ravenna, and of the Shelleys, all point in the same direction; and if any doubt existed, a close study of the wild and wayward character of Claire Clairmont would show where the truth in the matter lay. Byron was pestered by appeals from Allegra's mother, indirectly on her own behalf, and directly on behalf of the child. Claire never understood that, by reason of Byron's antipathy to her, the surest way of not getting what she wanted was to ask for it; and, with appalling persistency, she even persuaded Shelley to risk his undoubted influence over Byron by intercessions on her behalf, until Byron's opinion of Shelley's judgment was shaken. After making full allowance for the maternal feeling, so strong in all women, it was exceedingly foolish of Claire not to perceive that Byron, by taking upon himself the adoption of the child, had shielded her from scandal; and that, having surrendered Allegra to his care, Claire could not pretend to any claim or responsibility in the matter. It should also be pointed out that, in sending Allegra to the convent at Bagnacavallo, Byron had no intention of leaving her there for any length of time. It was merely a provisional step, and, at Hoppner's suggestion, Byron thought of sending the child to a good institution in Switzerland. In his will he had bequeathed to the child the sum of £5,000, which was to be paid to her either on her marriage or on her attaining the age of twenty-one years (according as the one or the other should happen first), with the proviso that she should not marry with a native of Great Britain. Byron was anxious to keep her out of England, because he thought that his natural daughter would be under great disadvantage in that country, and would have a far better chance abroad.

CHAPTER III

On April 26, 1822, the Shelleys left Pisa for Lerici, and on May 1 they took up their abode in the Casa Magni, situated near the fishing-village of San Terenzo. Towards the close of May, Byron moved to his new residence at Montenero, near Leghorn.

Leigh Hunt's arrival, at the end of June, added considerably to Byron's perplexities. The poet had not seen Hunt since they parted in England six years before, and many things had happened to both of them since then. Byron, never satisfied that his promise to contribute poetry to a joint stock literary periodical was wise, disliked the idea more and more as time went on, and Shelley foresaw considerable difficulties in the way of keeping Byron up to the mark in this respect. Hunt had brought over by sea a sick wife and several children, and opened the ball by asking Byron for a loan of money to meet current expenses. Byron now discovered that Leigh Hunt had ceased to be editor of the *Examiner*, and, being absolutely without any source of income, had no prospect save the money he hoped to get from a journal not yet in existence. He ought, of course, to have told both Byron and Shelley that in coming to Italy with his family – a wife and six children – he would naturally expect one or both of his friends to provide the necessary funds. This information Hunt withheld, and although both Byron and Shelley knew him to be in pecuniary embarrassment, and had every wish to assist him, they were both under the impression that Hunt had some small income from the *Examiner*. Byron was astonished to hear that his proposed coadjutor in a literary venture had not enough money in his pockets even for one month's current expenses. He was not inclined to submit tamely to Hunt's arrangements for sucking money out of him.

Beginning as he meant to go on, Byron from the first showed Hunt that he had no intention of being imposed upon, and the social intercourse between them was, to say the least of it, somewhat strained. Byron and Shelley between them had furnished the ground-floor of the Palazzo Lanfranchi for the Hunt family, and had Shelley lived he would, presumably, have impoverished himself by disbursements in their favour; but his death placed the Hunts in a false position. Had Shelley lived, his influence over Byron would have diminished the friction between Byron and his tactless guest. The amount of money spent by Byron on the Hunt family was not great, but, considering the comparative cheapness of living in Italy at that time, and the difference in the value of money, Byron's contribution was not niggardly. After paying for the furniture of their rooms in his palace, and sending £200 for the cost of their voyage to Italy, Byron gave Leigh Hunt £70 while he was at Pisa, defrayed the cost of their journey from Pisa to Genoa, and supplied them with another £30 to enable them to travel to Florence. There was really no occasion for Byron to make Hunt a present of £500, which he seems to have done, except Hunt's absolute incapacity to make both ends meet, which was his perpetual weakness. From the manner in which Hunt treats his pecuniary transactions with the wide-awake Byron, it is evident that the sum would have risen to thousands if Byron had not turned a deaf ear to the 'insatiable applicant' at his elbow.

On the first visit which Trelawny paid to Byron at the Palazzo Lanfranchi after Hunt's arrival, he found Mrs. Hunt was confined to her room, as she generally was, from bad health. Trelawny says:

> 'Hunt, too, was in delicate health – a hypochondriac; and the seven children, untamed, the eldest a little more than ten, and the youngest a yearling, were scattered about playing on the large marble staircase and in the hall. Hunt's theory and practice were that children should be unrestrained until they were of an age to be reasoned with. If they kept out of his way he was satisfied. On my entering the poet's study, I said to him, "The Hunts have effected a lodgment in your palace;" and I was thinking how different must have been his emotion on the arrival of the Hunts from that

> triumphant morning after the publication of "Childe Harold" when he "awoke and found himself famous.'"

Truth told, the Hunts' lodgment in his palace must have been a terrible infliction to the sensitive Byron. His letters to friends in England at this time are full of allusions to the prevailing discomfort. Trelawny tells us that

> 'Byron could not realize, till the actual experiment was tried, the nuisance of having a man with a sick wife and seven disorderly children interrupting his solitude and his ordinary customs – especially as Hunt did not conceal that his estimate of Byron's poetry was not exalted. At that time Hunt thought highly of his own poetry and underestimated all other. Leigh Hunt thought that Shelley would have made a great poet if he had written on intelligible subjects. Shelley soared too high for him, and Byron flew too near the ground. There was not a single subject on which Byron and Hunt could agree.'

After Shelley and his friend Williams had established the Hunts in Lord Byron's palace at Pisa, they returned to Leghorn, Shelley 'in a mournful mood, depressed by a recent interview with Byron,' says Trelawny.

It was evident to all who knew Byron that he bitterly repented having pledged himself to embark on the literary venture which, unfortunately, he himself had initiated. At their last interview Shelley found Byron irritable whilst talking with him on the fulfilment of his promises with regard to Leigh Hunt. Byron, like a lion caught in a trap, could only grind his teeth and bear it. Unfortunately, it was not in Byron's nature to bear things becomingly; he could not restrain the exhibition of his inner mind. On these occasions he was not at his best, and forgot the courtesy due even to the most unwelcome guest. Williams appears to have been much impressed by Byron's reception of Mrs. Hunt, and, writing to his wife from Leghorn, says:

> 'Lord Byron's reception of Mrs. Hunt was most shameful. She came into his house sick and exhausted, and he scarcely deigned to notice her; was silent, and scarcely bowed. This conduct cut Hunt to the soul. But the way in which he received our friend Roberts, at Dunn's door,[6] shall be described when we meet: it must be acted.'

Shelley and Edward Williams, two days after that letter had been written – on Monday, July 8, 1822, at three o'clock in the afternoon – set sail on the *Ariel* for their home on the Gulf of Spezzia. The story is well known, thanks to the graphic pen of Edward Trelawny, and we need only allude to the deaths of Shelley and Williams, and the sailor lad Charles Vivian, in so far as it comes into our picture of Byron at this period.

Byron attended the cremation of the bodies of Shelley and Williams, and showed his deep sympathy with Mary Shelley and Jane Williams in various ways.

Writing to John Murray from Pisa on August 3, 1822, he says:

> 'I presume you have heard that Mr. Shelley and Captain Williams were lost on the 7th ultimo in their passage from Leghorn to Spezzia, in their own open boat. You may imagine the state of their families: I never saw such a scene, nor wish to see another. You were all brutally mistaken about Shelley, who was, without exception, the *best* and least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison.'[7]

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[6] Henry Dunn kept a British shop at Leghorn.

[7] For Byron's opinion of Shelley's poetry, see appendix to 'The Two Foscari': 'I highly admire the poetry of "Queen Mab" and Shelley's other publications.'

Writing August 8, 1822, to Thomas Moore, Byron says in allusion to Shelley's death:

> 'There is thus another man gone, about whom the world was ill-naturedly, and ignorantly, and brutally mistaken. It will, perhaps, do him justice *now*, when he can be no better for it.'

In another letter, written December 25, 1822, Byron says:

> 'You are all mistaken about Shelley. You do not know how mild, how tolerant, how good he was in society; and as perfect a gentleman as ever crossed a drawing-room, when he liked, and where he liked.'

Byron's opinion of Leigh Hunt, and his own connection with that ill-fated venture known as *The Liberal*, is concisely given by Byron himself in a letter to Murray. *The Liberal*, published October 15, 1822, was fiercely attacked in the *Literary Gazette* and other periodicals. The *Courier* for October 26, 1822, calls it a 'scoundrel-like publication.' Byron writes:

> 'I am afraid the journal is a *bad* business, and won't do; but in it I am sacrificing *myself* for others – I can have no advantage in it. I believe the brothers Hunt to be honest men; I am sure they are poor ones. They have not a rap: they pressed me to engage in this work, and in an evil hour I consented; still, I shall not repent, if I can do them the least service. I have done all I can for Leigh Hunt since he came here; but it is almost useless. His wife is ill, his six children not very tractable, and in the affairs of the world he himself is a child. The death of Shelley left them totally aground; and I could not see them in such a state without using the common feelings of humanity, and what means were in my power to set them afloat again.'

In another letter to Murray (December 25, 1822) Byron says:

> 'Had their [the Hunts'] journal gone on well, and I could have aided to make it better for them, I should then have left them, after my safe pilotage off a lee-shore, to make a prosperous voyage by themselves. As it is, I can't, and would not if I could, leave them amidst the breakers. As to any community of feeling, thought, or opinion between Leigh Hunt and me, there is little or none. We meet rarely, hardly ever; but I think him a good-principled and able man, and must do as I would be done by. I do not know what world he has lived in, but I have lived in three or four; and none of them like his Keats and Kangaroo *terra incognita*. Alas! poor Shelley! how he would have laughed had he lived, and how we used to laugh now and then, at various things, which are grave in the Suburbs!'

It is perhaps not generally known that Shelley bequeathed a legacy of £2,000 to Byron. Byron's renunciation of this token of friendship is ignored by Professor Dowden in his life of Shelley. Writing to Leigh Hunt on June 28, 1823, Byron says:

> 'There was something about a legacy of two thousand pounds which he [Shelley] has left me. This, of course, I declined, and the more so that I hear that his will is admitted valid; and I state this distinctly that, in case of anything happening to me, my heirs may be instructed not to claim it.'

Towards the end of September, 1822, Byron and the Countess Guiccioli left the Palazzo Lanfranchi, and moved from Pisa to Albaro, a suburb of Genoa. At the Villa Saluzzo, where the poet resided until his departure for Greece, dwelt also Count Gamba and his son Pietro, who occupied one part of that large house, while Byron occupied another part, and their establishments were quite separate. The first number of *The Liberal* which had been printed in London, reached Byron's hands at this time. The birth of that unlucky publication was soon followed by its death, as anyone knowing the circumstances attending its conception might have foreseen. Shelley's death may be said to have

destroyed the enterprise and energy of the survivors of that small coterie, who, in the absence of that vital force, the fine spirit that had animated and held them together, 'degenerated apace,' as Trelawny tells us. Byron 'exhausted himself in planning, projecting, beginning, wishing, intending, postponing, regretting, and doing nothing. The unready are fertile in excuses, and his were inexhaustible.'

In December, 1822, Trelawny laid up Byron's yacht, *The Bolivar*, paid off the crew, and started on horseback for Rome. *The Bolivar* was eventually sold by Byron to Lord Blessington for 400 guineas. Four or five years after Byron's death this excellent little sea-boat, with Captain Roberts (who planned her for Byron) on board, struck on the iron-bound coast of the Adriatic and foundered. Not a plank of her was saved.

> 'Never,' said Captain Roberts in narrating the circumstance many years afterwards, 'was there a better sea-boat, or one that made less lee-way than the dear little *Bolivar*, but she could not walk in the wind's eye. I dared not venture to put her about in that gale for fear of getting into the trough of the sea and being swamped. To take in sail was impossible, so all we had left for it was to luff her up in the lulls, and trust to Providence for the rest. Night came on dark and cold, for it was November, and as the sea boiled and foamed in her wake, it shone through the pitchy darkness with a phosphoric efflorescence. The last thing I heard was my companion's exclamation, "Breakers ahead!" and almost at the same instant *The Bolivar* struck: the crash was awful; a watery column fell upon her bodily like an avalanche, and all that I remember was, that I was struggling with the waves. I am a strong swimmer, and have often contested with Byron in his own element, so after battling long with the billows, covered with bruises, and more dead than alive, I succeeded in scrambling up the rocks, and found myself in the evergreen pine-forest of Ravenna, some miles from any house. But at last I sheltered myself in a forester's hut. Death and I had a hard struggle that bout.'[8]

On April 1, 1823, Lord and Lady Blessington called on Byron at the Casa Saluzzo. Lady Blessington assures us that, in speaking of his wife, Byron declared that he was totally unconscious of the cause of her leaving him. He said that he left no means untried to effect a reconciliation, and added with bitterness: 'A day will arrive when I shall be avenged. I feel that I shall not live long, and when the grave has closed over me, what must she feel!'

In speaking of his sister, Byron always spoke with strong affection, and said that she was the most faultless person he had ever known, and that she was his only source of consolation in his troubles during the separation business.

> 'Byron,' says Lady Blessington, 'has remarkable penetration in discovering the characters of those around him, and piques himself on it. He also thinks that he has fathomed the recesses of his own mind; but he is mistaken. With much that is *little* (which he suspects) in his character, there is much that is *great* that he does not give himself credit for. His first impulses are always good, but his temper, which is impatient, prevents his acting on the cool dictates of reason. He mistakes temper for character, and takes the ebullitions of the first for the indications of the nature of the second.'

Lady Blessington seems to have made a most searching examination of Byron's character, and very little escaped her vigilance during the two months of their intimate intercourse. She tells us that Byron talked for effect, and liked to excite astonishment. It was difficult to know when he was serious, or when he was merely 'bamming' his aquaintances. He admitted that he liked to *hoax* people, in order that they might give contradictory accounts of him and of his opinions. He spoke very highly

[8] 'The Angler in Wales,' by Thomas Medwin, vol. ii., pp. 144-146.

of Countess Guiccioli, whom he had passionately loved and deeply respected. Lady Blessington says: 'In his praises of Madame Guiccioli it is quite evident that he is sincere.'

Byron confessed that he was not happy, but admitted that it was his own fault, as the Countess Guiccioli, the only object of his love, had all the qualities to render a reasonable being happy. In speaking of Allegra, Byron said that while she lived her existence never seemed necessary to his happiness; but no sooner did he lose her than it appeared to him as though he could not exist without her. It is noteworthy that, one evening, while Byron was speaking to Lady Blessington at her hotel at Genoa, he pointed out to her a boat at anchor in the harbour, and said: 'That is the boat in which my friend Shelley went down – the sight of it makes me ill. You should have known Shelley to feel how much I must regret him. He was the most gentle, most amiable, and *least* worldly-minded person I ever met; full of delicacy, disinterested beyond all other men, and possessing a degree of genius, joined to a simplicity, as rare as it is admirable. He had formed to himself a *beau-idéal* of all that is fine, high-minded, and noble, and he acted up to this ideal even to the very letter. He had a most brilliant imagination, but a total want of worldly wisdom. I have seen nothing like him, and never shall again, I am certain.'

We may, upon the evidence before us, take it for certain that Byron only admired two of his contemporaries – Sir Walter Scott and Shelley. He liked Hobhouse, and they had travelled together without a serious quarrel, which is a proof of friendship; but he felt that Hobhouse undervalued him, and, as Byron had a good deal of the spoiled child about him, he resented the friendly admonitions which, it seems, Hobhouse unsparingly administered whenever they were together. Tom Moore was a 'croney' – a man to laugh and sit through the night with – but there was nothing, either in his genius or his conduct, which Byron could fall down and worship, as he seemed capable of doing in the case of Shelley and Scott.

It is evident that Lady Byron occupied his thoughts continually; he constantly mentioned her in conversation, and often spoke of the brief period during which they lived together. He told Lady Blessington that, though not regularly handsome, he liked her looks. He said that when he reflected on the whole tenor of her conduct – the refusing any explanation, never answering his letters, or holding out any hopes that in future years their child might form a bond of union between them – he felt exasperated against her, and vented this feeling in his writings. The mystery of Lady Byron's silence piqued him and kept alive his interest in her. It was evident to those who knew Byron during the last year of his life that he anxiously desired a reconciliation with her. He seemed to think that, had his pecuniary affairs been in a less ruinous state, his temper would not have been excited as it constantly was, during the brief period of their union, by demands of insolent creditors whom he was unable to satisfy, and who drove him nearly out of his senses, until he lost all command of himself, and so forfeited his wife's affection. Byron felt himself to blame for such conduct, and bitterly repented of it. But he never could divest himself of the idea that his wife still took a deep interest in him, and said that Ada must always be a bond of union between them, though perchance they were parted for ever.

> 'I am sure,' said Lady Blessington, 'that if ten individuals undertook the task of describing Byron, no two of the ten would agree in their verdict respecting him, or convey any portrait that resembled the other, and yet the description of each might be correct, according to individual opinion. The truth is, that the chameleon-like character or manner of Byron renders it difficult to portray him; and the pleasure he seems to take in misleading his associates in their estimation of him increases the difficulty of the task.'

On one occasion Byron lifted the veil, and showed his inmost thoughts by words which were carefully noted at the time. He spoke on this occasion from the depth of his heart as follows:

> 'Can I reflect on my present position without bitter feelings? Exiled from my country by a species of ostracism – the most humiliating to a proud mind,

> when *daggers* and not shells were used to ballot, inflicting mental wounds more deadly and difficult to be healed than all that the body could suffer. Then the notoriety that follows me precludes the privacy I desire, and renders me an object of curiosity, which is a continual source of irritation to my feelings. I am bound by the indissoluble ties of marriage to *one* who will *not* live with me, and live with one to whom I cannot give a legal right to be my companion, and who, wanting that right, is placed in a position humiliating to her and most painful to me. Were the Countess Guiccioli and I married, we should, I am sure, be cited as an example of conjugal happiness, and the domestic and retired life we lead would entitle us to respect. But our union, wanting the legal and religious part of the ceremony of marriage, draws on us both censure and blame. She is formed to make a good wife to any man to whom she attaches herself. She is fond of retirement, is of a most affectionate disposition, and noble-minded and disinterested to the highest degree. Judge then how mortifying it must be to me to be the cause of placing her in a false position. All this is not thought of when people are blinded by passion, but when passion is replaced by better feelings – those of affection, friendship, and confidence – when, in short, the *liaison* has all of marriage but its forms, then it is that we wish to give it the respectability of wedlock. I feel this keenly, reckless as I appear, though there are few to whom I would avow it, and certainly not to a man.'

There is much in this statement which it is necessary for those who wish to understand Byron's position at the close of his life to bear in mind. We may accept it unreservedly, for it coincides in every particular with conclusions independently arrived at by the present writer, after a long and patient study of all circumstances relating to the life of this extraordinary man. At the period of which we write – the last phase in Byron's brief career – the poet was, morally, ascending.

His character, through the fire of suffering, had been purified. Even his pride – so assertive in public – had been humbled, and he was gradually and insensibly preparing himself for a higher destiny, unconscious of the fact that the hand of Death was upon him. 'Wait,' he said, 'and you will see me one day become all that I ought to be. I have reflected seriously on all my faults, and that is the first step towards amendment.'

CHAPTER IV

Certain it is, that in proportion to the admiration which Byron's poetic genius excited, was the severity of the censure which his fellow-countrymen bestowed on his defects as a man. The humour of the situation no doubt appealed to Byron's acute sense of proportion, and induced him to feed the calumnies against himself, by painting his own portrait in the darkest colours. Unfortunately, the effects of such conduct long survived him; for the world is prone to take a man at his own valuation, and 'hypocrisy reversed' does not enter into human calculations. It is unfortunate for the fame of Byron that his whole conduct after the separation was a glaring blunder, for which no subsequent act of his, no proof of his genius, could by any possibility atone.

Truth told, the obloquy which Byron had to endure, after Lady Byron left him, was such as might well have changed his whole nature. It must indeed have been galling to that proud spirit, after having been humbly asked everywhere, to be ostentatiously asked nowhere. The injustice he suffered at the hands of those who were fed on baseless calumnies raised in his breast a feeling of profound contempt for his fellow-creatures – a contempt which led him into many follies; thus, instead of standing up against the storm and meeting his detractors face to face, as he was both capable of and justified in doing, he chose to leave England under a cloud, and, by a system of mystification, to encourage the belief that he thoroughly deserved the humiliation which had been cast upon him. As a consequence, to employ the words of Macaulay,

> 'all those creeping things that riot in the decay of nobler natures hastened to their repast; and they were right; they did after their kind. It is not every day that the savage envy of aspiring dunces is gratified by the agonies of such a spirit, and the degradation of such a name.'

Lady Blessington tells us that Byron had an excellent heart, but that it was running to waste for want of being allowed to expend itself on his fellow-creatures. His heart teemed with affection, but his past experiences had checked its course, and left it to prey on the aching void in his breast. He could never forget his sorrows, which in a certain sense had unhinged his mind, and caused him to deny to others the justice that had been denied to himself. He affected to disbelieve in either love or friendship, and yet was capable of making great sacrifices for both.

> 'He has an unaccountable passion for misrepresenting his own feelings and motives, and exaggerates his defects more than an enemy could do; and is often angry because we do not believe all he says against himself. If Byron were not a great poet, the charlatanism of affecting to be a Satanic character, in this our matter-of-fact nineteenth century, would be very amusing: but when the genius of the man is taken into account, it appears too ridiculous, and one feels mortified that he should attempt to pass for something that all who know him rejoice that he is not. If Byron knew his own power, he would disdain such unworthy means of attracting attention, and trust to his merit for commanding it.'

As Lady Blessington remarks in her 'Conversations of Lord Byron,' from which we have largely quoted, Byron's pre-eminence as a poet gives an interest to details which otherwise would not be worth mentioning. She tells us, for instance, that one of the strongest anomalies in Byron was the exquisite taste displayed in his descriptive poetry, and the total want of it that was so apparent in his modes of life.

> 'Fine scenery seemed to have no effect upon him, though his descriptions are so glowing, and the elegancies and comforts of refined life Byron appeared to as little understand as value.'

Byron appeared to be wholly ignorant of what in his class of life constituted its ordinary luxuries.

> 'I have seen him,' says Lady Blessington, 'apparently delighted with the luxurious inventions in furniture, equipages, plate, etc., common to all persons of a certain station or fortune, and yet after an inquiry as to their prices – an inquiry so seldom made by persons of his rank – shrink back alarmed at the thought of the expense, though there was nothing alarming in it, and congratulate himself that he had no such luxuries, or did not require them. I should say that a bad and vulgar taste predominated in all Byron's equipments, whether in dress or in furniture. I saw his bed at Genoa, when I passed through in 1826, and it certainly was the most vulgarly gaudy thing I ever saw; the curtains in the worst taste, and the cornice having his family motto of "Crede Byron" surmounted by baronial coronets. His carriages and his liveries were in the same bad taste, having an affectation of finery, but *mesquin* in the details, and tawdry in the *ensemble*. It was evident that he piqued himself on them, by the complacency with which they were referred to.'

In one of Byron's expansive moods – and these were rare with men, though frequent in the society of Lady Blessington – Byron, speaking of his wife, said:

> 'I am certain that Lady Byron's first idea is, what is due to herself; I mean that it is the undeviating rule of her conduct. I wish she had thought a little more of what is due to others. Now, my besetting sin is a want of that self-respect which she has in *excess*; and that want has produced much unhappiness to us both. But though I accuse Lady Byron of an excess of self-respect, I must in candour admit, that if any person ever had an excuse for an extraordinary portion of it, she has; as in all her thoughts, words, and deeds, she is the most decorous woman that ever existed, and must appear a perfect and refined gentlewoman even to her *femme-de-chambre*. This extraordinary degree of self-command in Lady Byron produced an opposite effect on me. When I have broken out, on slight provocations, into one of my ungovernable fits of rage, her calmness piqued, and seemed to reproach me; it gave her an air of superiority, that vexed and increased my wrath. I am now older and wiser, and should know how to appreciate her conduct as it deserved, as I look on self-command as a positive virtue, though it is one I have not the courage to adopt.'

In speaking of his sister, shortly before his departure for Greece, Byron maintained that he owed the little good which he could boast, to her influence over his wayward nature. He regretted that he had not known her earlier, as it might have influenced his destiny.

> 'To me she was, in the hour of need, as a tower of strength. Her affection was my last rallying point, and is now the only bright spot that the horizon of England offers to my view.' 'Augusta,' said Byron, 'knew all my weaknesses, but she had love enough to bear with them. She has given me such good advice, and yet, finding me incapable of following it, loved and pitied me the more, because I was erring. This is true affection, and, above all, true Christian feeling.'

But we should not be writing about Byron and his foibles eighty-four years after his death, if he had not been wholly different to other men in his views of life. Shortly after his marriage, for no sufficient, or at least for no apparent reason, Byron chose to immolate himself, and took a sort of Tarpeian leap, passing the remainder of his existence in bemoaning his bruises, and reviling the spectators who were not responsible for his fall. One of the main results of this conduct was his separation from his child, for whom he seems to have felt the deepest affection. We find him, at the

close of his life, constantly speaking of Ada, 'sole daughter of his heart and house,' and prophesying the advent of a love whose consolations he could never feel.

> 'I often, in imagination, pass over a long lapse of years,' said Byron, 'and console myself for present privations, in anticipating the time when my daughter will know me by reading my works; for, though the hand of prejudice may conceal my portrait from her eyes,[9] it cannot hereafter conceal my thoughts and feelings, which will talk to her when he to whom they belonged has ceased to exist. The triumph will then be mine; and the tears that my child will drop over expressions wrung from me by mental agony – the certainty that she will enter into the sentiments which dictated the various allusions to her and to myself in my works – consoles me in many a gloomy hour.'

This prophecy was amply fulfilled. It appears that, after Ada's marriage to Lord King, Colonel Wildman met her in London, and invited her to pay him a visit at Newstead Abbey. One morning, while Ada was in the library, Colonel Wildman took down a book of poems. Ada asked the name of the author of these poems, and when shown the portrait of her father – Phillips's well-known portrait – which hung upon the wall, Ada remained for a moment spell-bound, and then remarked ingenuously: 'Please do not think that it is affectation on my part when I declare to you that I have been brought up in complete ignorance of all that concerns my father.' Never until that moment had Ada seen the handwriting of her father, and, as we know, even his portrait had been hidden from her. When Byron's genius was revealed to his daughter, an enthusiasm for his memory filled her soul. She shut herself up for hours in the rooms which Byron had used, absorbed in all the glory of one whose tenderness for her had been so sedulously concealed by her mother. On her death-bed she dictated a letter to Colonel Wildman, begging that she might be buried at Hucknall-Torkard, in the same vault as her illustrious father. And there they sleep the long sleep side by side – separated during life, united in death – the prophecy of 1816 fulfilled in 1852:

> 'Yet, though dull Hate as duty should be taught,
> I know that thou wilt love me; though my name
> Should be shut from thee, as a spell still fraught
> With desolation, and a broken claim:
> Though the grave closed between us, – 'twere the same,
> I know that thou wilt love me; though to drain
> *My* blood from out thy being were an aim
> And an attainment, – all would be in vain, —
> Still thou wouldst love me, still that more than life retain.'

[9] Lady Noel left by her will to the trustees a portrait of Byron, with directions that it was not to be shown to his daughter Ada till she attained the age of twenty-one; but that if her mother were still living, it was not to be so delivered without Lady Byron's consent.

CHAPTER V

There is no doubt that Byron had a craving for celebrity in one form or another. In the last year of his life his thoughts turned with something like apathy from the fame which his pen had brought him[10] towards that wider and nobler fame which might be attained by the sword. In the spirit of an exalted poet who has lately passed from us, if such prescience were possible, Byron might have applied these stirring lines to himself:

> 'Up, then, and act! Rise up and undertake
> The duties of to-day. Thy courage wake!
> Spend not life's strength in idleness, for life
> Should not be wasted in Care's useless strife.
> No slothful doubt let work's place occupy,
> But labour! Labour for posterity!
>
> 'Up, then, and sing! Rise up and bare the sword
> With which to combat suffering and wrong.
> Console all those that suffer with thy word,
> Defend Man's heritage with sword and song!
> Combat intrigue, injustice, tyranny,
> And in thine efforts God will be with thee.'

> 'I have made as many sacrifices to liberty,' said Byron, 'as most people of my age; and the one I am about to undertake is not the least, though probably it will be the last; for with my broken health, and the chances of war, Greece will most likely terminate my career. I like Italy, its climate, its customs, and, above all, its freedom from cant of every kind; therefore it is no slight sacrifice of comfort to give up the tranquil life I lead here, and break through the ties I have formed, to engage in a cause, for the successful result of which I have no very sanguine hopes. I have a presentiment that I shall die in Greece. I hope it may be in action, for that would be a good finish to a very *triste* existence, and I have a horror of death-bed scenes; but as I have not been famous for my luck in life, most probably I shall not have more in the manner of my death.'

It was towards the close of May, 1823, that Byron received a letter telling him that he had been elected a member of the Committee which sat in London to further the Greek cause. Byron willingly accepted the appointment, and from that moment turned his thoughts towards Greece, without exactly knowing in what manner he could best serve her cause. He experienced alternations of confidence and despondency certainly, but he never abandoned the notion that he might be of use, if only he could see his way clearly through the conflicting opinions and advice which reached him from all sides.

The presentiment that he would end his days in Greece, weighed so heavily on his mind, that he felt a most intense desire to revisit his native country before finally throwing in his lot with the Greeks. He seems to have vaguely felt that all chances of reconciliation with Lady Byron were not dead. He would have liked to say farewell to her without bitterness, and he longed to embrace his child. But the objections to a return to England were so formidable that he was compelled to abandon the idea. His proud nature could not face the chance of a cold reception, and a revival of that roar

[10] It was at this time that Byron endeavoured to suppress the fact that he had written 'The Age of Bronze.'

of calumny which had driven him from our shores. He told Lady Blessington that he could laugh at those attacks with the sea between him and his traducers; but that on the spot, and feeling the effect which each libel produced upon the minds of his too sensitive friends, he could not stand the strain. Byron felt sure that his enemies would misinterpret his motives, and that no good would come of it.

After Byron had made up his mind to visit Greece in person, he does not appear ever to have seriously thought of drawing back. On June 15, 1823, he informed Trelawny, who was at Rome, that he was determined to go to Greece, and asked him to join the expedition. Seven days later Byron had hired a vessel to transport himself, his companions, his servants, and his horses, to Cephalonia.

On July 13, Byron, with Edward Trelawny, Count Pietro Gamba, and a young medical student,[11] with eight servants, embarked at Genoa on the English brig *Hercules*, commanded by Captain Scott. At the last moment a passage was offered to a Greek named Schilitzy, and to Mr. Hamilton Browne. Gamba tells us that five horses were shipped, besides arms, ammunition, and two one-pounder guns which had belonged to *The Bolivar*. Byron carried with him 10,000 Spanish dollars in ready-money, with bills of exchange for 40,000 more.

Passing within sight of Elba, Corsica, the Lipari Islands (including Stromboli,) Sicily, Italy, etc., on August 2, the *Hercules* lay between Zante and Cephalonia; and the next day she cast anchor in Argostoli, the principal port of Cephalonia. The Resident, Colonel Napier, was at that time absent from the island. Shortly after Byron's arrival, Captain Kennedy, Colonel Napier's secretary, came on board, and informed him that little was known of the internal affairs of Greece. The Turks appeared to have been in force at sea, while the Greeks remained inactive at Hydra, Spezia, and Ipsara. It was supposed that Mr. Blaquière had gone to Corfu, while the famous Marco Botzari, to whom Byron had been especially recommended, was at Missolonghi. Before taking any definite step, Byron judged it best to send messengers to Corfu and Missolonghi, to collect information as to the state of affairs in the Morea. To pass the time, Byron and some of his companions made an excursion to Ithaca. The first opportunity of showing his sympathy towards the victims of barbarism and tyranny occurred at this period. Many poor families had taken refuge at Ithaca, from Scio, Patras, and other parts of Greece. Byron handed 3,000 piastres to the Commandant for their relief, and transported a family, in absolute poverty, to Cephalonia, where he provided them with a house and gave them a monthly allowance.

The following narrative, written by a gentleman who was travelling in Ithaca at that time, seems to be worthy of reproduction in these pages:

> 'It was in the island of Ithaca, in the month of August, 1823, that I was shown into the dining-room of the Resident Governor, where Lord Byron, Count Gamba, Dr. Bruno, Mr. Trelawny, and Mr. Hamilton Browne, were seated after dinner, with some of the English officers and principal inhabitants of the place. I had been informed of Lord Byron's presence, but had no means of finding him out, except by recollection of his portraits; and I am not ashamed to confess that I was puzzled, in my examination of the various countenances before me, where to fix upon "the man." I at one time almost settled upon Trelawny, from the interest which he seemed to take in the schooner in which I had just arrived; but on ascending to the drawing-room I was most agreeably undeceived by finding myself close to the side of the great object of my curiosity, and engaged in easy conversation with him, without presentation or introduction of any kind.
>
> 'He was handling and remarking upon the books in some small open shelves, and fairly spoke to me in such a manner that not to have replied would have been boorish. "'Pope's Homer's Odyssey' – hum! – that is well placed here, undoubtedly; 'Hume's Essays,' – 'Tales of my Landlord;' there you are, Watty! Are you recently

[11] Dr. Bruno.

from England, sir?" I answered that I had not been there for two years. "Then you can bring us no news of the Greek Committee? Here we are all waiting orders, and no orders seem likely to come. Ha! ha!" "I have not changed my opinion of the Greeks," he said. "I know them as well as most people" (a favourite phrase), "but we must not look always too closely at the men who are to benefit by our exertions in a good cause, or God knows we shall seldom do much good in this world. There is Trelawny thinks he has fallen in with an angel in Prince Mavrocordato, and little Bruno would willingly sacrifice his life for the *cause*, as he calls it. I must say he has shown some sincerity in his devotion, in consenting to join it for the little matter he makes of me." I ventured to say that, in all probability, the being joined with him in any cause was inducement enough for any man of moderate pretensions. He noticed the compliment only by an indifferent smile. "I find but one opinion," he continued, "among all people whom I have met since I came here, that no good is to be done for these rascally Greeks; that I am sure to be deceived, disgusted, and all the rest of it. It may be so; but it is chiefly to satisfy myself upon these very points that I am going. I go prepared for anything, expecting a deal of roguery and imposition, but hoping to do some good."

"'Have you read any of the late publications on Greece?" I asked.

"'I never read any accounts of a country to which I can myself go," said he. "The Committee have sent me some of their 'Crown and Anchor' reports, but I can make nothing of them."

'The conversation continued in the same familiar flow. To my increased amazement, he led it to his works, to Lady Byron, and to his daughter. The former was suggested by a volume of "Childe Harold" which was on the table; it was the ugly square little German edition, and I made free to characterize it as execrable. He turned over the leaves, and said:

'Yes, it was very bad; but it was better than one that he had seen in French prose in Switzerland. "I know not what my friend Mr. Murray will say to it all. Kinnaird writes to me that he is wroth about many things; let them do what they like with the book – they have been abusive enough of the author. The *Quarterly* is trying to make amends, however, and *Blackwood's* people will suffer none to attack me but themselves. Milman was, I believe, at the bottom of the personalities, but they all sink before an American reviewer, who describes me as a kind of fiend, and says that the deformities of my mind are only to be equalled by those of my body; it is well that anyone can see them, at least." Our hostess, Mrs. Knox, advanced to us about this moment, and his lordship continued, smiling: "Does not your Gordon blood rise at such abuse of a clansman? The gallant Gordons 'bruik nae slight.' Are you true to your name, Mrs. Knox?" The lady was loud in her reprobation of the atrocious abuse that had recently been heaped upon the noble lord, and joined in his assumed clannish regard for their mutual name. "Lady Byron and you would agree," he said, laughing, "though I could not, you are thinking; you may say so, I assure you. I dare say it will turn out that I have been terribly in the wrong, *but I always want to know what I did*." I had not courage to touch upon this delicate topic, and Mrs. Knox seemed to wish it passed over till a less public occasion. He spoke of Ada exactly as any parent might have done of a beloved absent child, and betrayed not the slightest confusion, or consciousness of a sore subject, throughout the whole conversation.

'I now learnt from him that he had arrived in the island from Cephalonia only that morning, and that it was his purpose (as it was mine) to visit its antiquities and localities. A ride to the Fountain of Arethusa had been planned for the next day, and

I had the happiness of being invited to join it. Pope's "Homer" was taken up for a description of the place, and it led to the following remarks:

"Yes, the very best translation that ever was, or ever will be; there is nothing like it in the world, be assured. It is quite delightful to find Pope's character coming round again; I forgive Gifford everything for that. Puritan as he is, he has too much good sense not to know that, even if all the lies about Pope were truths, his character is one of the best among literary men. There is nobody now like him, except Watty,[12] and he is as nearly faultless as ever human being was."

'The remainder of the evening was passed in arranging the plan of proceeding on the morrow's excursion, in the course of which his lordship occasionally interjected a facetious remark of some general nature; but in such fascinating tones, and with such a degree of amiability and familiarity, that, of all the libels of which I well knew the public press to be guilty, that of describing Lord Byron as inaccessible, morose, and repulsive in manner and language, seemed to me the most false and atrocious. I found I was to be accommodated for the night under the same roof with his lordship, and I retired, satisfied in my own mind that favouring chance had that day made me the intimate (almost confidential) friend of the greatest literary man of modern times.

'The next morning, about nine o'clock, the party for the Fountain of Arethusa assembled in the parlour of Captain Knox; but Lord Byron was missing. Trelawny, who had slept in the room adjoining his lordship's, told us that he feared he had been ill during the night, but that he had gone out in a boat very early in the morning. At this moment I happened to be standing at the window, and saw the object of our anxiety in the act of landing on the beach, about ten or a dozen yards from the house, to which he walked slowly up. I never saw and could not conceive the possibility of such a change in the appearance of a human being as had taken place since the previous night. He looked like a man under sentence of death, or returning from the funeral of all that he held dear on earth. His person seemed shrunk, his face was pale, and his eyes languid and fixed on the ground. He was leaning upon a stick, and had changed his dark camlet-caped surtout of the preceding evening for a nankeen jacket embroidered like a hussar's – an attempt at dandyism, or dash, to which the look and demeanour of the wearer formed a sad contrast. On entering the room, his lordship made the usual salutations; and, after some preliminary arrangements, the party moved off, on horses and mules, to the place of destination for the day.

'I was so struck with the difference of appearance in Lord Byron that the determination to which I had come, to try to monopolize him, if possible, to myself, without regard to appearances or *bienséance*, almost entirely gave way under the terror of a freezing repulse. I advanced to him under the influence of this feeling, but I had scarcely received his answer when all uneasiness about my reception vanished, and I stuck as close to him as the road permitted our animals to go. His voice sounded timidly and quiveringly at first; but as the conversation proceeded, it became steady and firm. The beautiful country in which we were travelling naturally formed a prominent topic, as well as the character of the people and of the Government. Of the latter, I found him (to my amazement) an admirer. "There is a deal of fine stuff about that old Maitland," he said; "he knows the Greeks well. Do you know if it be true that he ordered one of their brigs to be blown out of the water if she stayed ten minutes longer in Corfu Roads?" I happened to know, and told him that it was

[12] Byron's sobriquet for Walter Scott.

true. “Well, of all follies, that of daring to say what one cannot dare to do is the least to be pitied. Do you think Sir Tom would have really executed his threat?” I told his lordship that I believed he certainly would, and that this knowledge of his being in earnest in everything he said was the cause, not only of the quiet termination of that affair, but of the order and subordination in the whole of the countries under his government.

‘The conversation again insensibly reverted to Sir Walter Scott, and Lord Byron repeated to me the anecdote of the interview in Murray’s shop, as conclusive evidence of his being the author of the “Waverley Novels.” He was a little but not durably staggered by the equally well-known anecdote of Sir Walter having, with some solemnity, denied the authorship to Mr. Wilson Croker, in the presence of George IV., the Duke of York, and the late Lord Canterbury. He agreed that an author wishing to conceal his authorship had a right to give *any answer whatever* that succeeded in convincing an inquirer that he was wrong in his suppositions.

‘When we came within sight of the object of our excursion, there happened to be an old shepherd in the act of coming down from the fountain. His lordship at once fixed upon him for Eumæus, and invited him back with us to “fill up the picture.” Having drunk of the fountain, and eaten of our less classical repast of cold fowls, etc., his lordship again became lively, and full of pleasant conceits. To detail the conversation (which was general and varied as the individuals that partook of it) is now impossible, and certainly not desirable if it were possible. I wish to observe, however, that on this and one very similar occasion, it was very unlike the kind of conversation which Lord Byron is described as holding with various individuals who have written about him. Still more unlike was it to what one would have *supposed* his conversation to be; it was exactly that of nine-tenths of the cultivated class of English gentlemen, careless and unconscious of everything but the present moment. Lord Byron ceased to be more than one of the party, and stood some sharp jokes, practical and verbal, with more good nature than would have done many of the ciphers whom one is doomed to tolerate in society.

‘We returned as we went, but no opportunity presented itself of introducing any subject of interest beyond that of the place and time. His lordship seemed quite restored by the excursion, and in the evening came to the Resident’s, bearing himself towards everybody in the same easy, gentlemanly way that rendered him the delight and ornament of every society in which he chose to unbend himself.

‘The Resident was as absolute a monarch as Ulysses, and I dare say much more hospitable and obliging. He found quarters for the whole Anglo-Italian party, in the best houses of the town, and received them on the following morning at the most luxurious of breakfasts, consisting, among other native productions, of fresh-gathered grapes, just ripened, but which were pronounced of some danger to be eaten, as not having had the “first rain.” This is worthy of note, as having been apparently a ground of their being taken by Lord Byron in preference to the riper and safer figs and nectarines; but he deemed it a fair reason for an apology to the worthy doctor of the 8th Regiment (Dr. Scott), who had cautioned the company against the fruit.

‘“I take them, doctor,” said his lordship, “as I take other prohibited things – in order to accustom myself to any and all things that a man may be compelled to take where I am going – in the same way that I abstain from all superfluities, even salt to my eggs or butter to my bread; and I take tea, Mrs. Knox, without sugar or

cream. But tea itself is, really, the most superfluous of superfluities, though I am never without it."

'I heard these observations as they were made to Dr. Scott, next to whom I was sitting, towards the end of the table; but I could not hear the animated conversation that was going on between his lordship and Mrs. Knox, beyond the occasional mention of "Penelope," and, when one of her children came in to her, "Telemachus" – names too obviously *à propos* of the place and persons to be omitted in any incidental conversation in Ithaca.

'The excursion to the "School of Homer" (why so called nobody seemed to know) was to be made by water; and the party of the preceding day, except the lady, embarked in an elegant country boat with four rowers, and sundry packages and jars of eatables and drinkables. As soon as we were seated under the awning – Lord Byron in the centre seat, with his face to the stern – Trelawny took charge of the tiller. The other passengers being seated on the side, the usual small flying general conversation began. Lord Byron seemed in a mood calculated to make the company think he meant something more formal than ordinary talk. Of course there could not be anything said in the nature of a dialogue, which, to be honest, was the kind of conversation that I had at heart. He began by informing us that he had just been reading, with renewed pleasure, David Hume's Essays. He considered Hume to be by far the most profound thinker and clearest reasoner of the many philosophers and metaphysicians of the last century. "There is," said he, "no refuting him, and for simplicity and clearness of style he is unmatched, and is utterly unanswerable." He referred particularly to the Essay on Miracles. It was remarked to him, that it had nevertheless been specifically answered, and, some people thought, refuted, by a Presbyterian divine, Dr. Campbell of Aberdeen. I could not hear whether his lordship knew of the author, but the remark did not affect his opinion; it merely turned the conversation to Aberdeen and "poor John Scott," the most promising and most unfortunate literary man of the day, whom he knew well, and who, said he, knew him (Lord Byron) as a schoolboy. Scotland, Walter Scott (or, as his lordship always called him, "Watty"), the "Waverley Novels," the "Rejected Addresses," and the English aristocracy (which he reviled most bitterly), were the prominent objects of nearly an hour's conversation. It was varied, towards the end of the voyage, in this original fashion: "But come, gentlemen, we must have some inspiration. Here, Tita, l'Hippocrena!"

'This brought from the bows of the boat a huge Venetian gondolier, with a musket slung diagonally across his back, a stone jar of two gallons of what turned out to be English gin, another porous one of water, and a quart pitcher, into which the gondolier poured the spirit, and laid the whole, with two or three large tumblers, at the feet of his expectant lord, who quickly uncorked the jar, and began to pour its contents into the smaller vessel.

'"Now, gentlemen, drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring; it is the true poetic source. I'm a rogue if I have drunk to-day. Come" (handing tumblers round to us), "this is the way;" and he nearly half filled a tumbler, and then poured from the height of his arm out of the water-jar, till the tumbler sparkled in the sun like soda-water, and drunk it off while effervescing, glorious gin-swizzle, a most tempting beverage, of which everyone on board took his share, munching after it a biscuit out of a huge tin case of them. This certainly exhilarated us, till we landed within some fifty or sixty yards of the house to which we were directed.

'On our way we learned that the Regent of the island – that is, the native Governor, as Captain Knox was the protecting Power's Governor (Viceroy over the King!) – had forwarded the materials of a substantial feast to the occupant (his brother); for the *nobili Inglesi*, who were to honour his premises. In mentioning this act of the Regent to Lord Byron, his remark was a repetition of the satirical line in the imitation address of the poet Fitzgerald, "God bless the Regent!" and as I mentioned the relationship to our approaching host, he added, with a laugh, "and the Duke of York!"

'On entering the mansion, we were received by the whole family, commencing with the mother of the Princes – a venerable lady of at least seventy, dressed in pure Greek costume, to whom Lord Byron went up with some formality, and, with a slight bend of the knee, took her hand, and kissed it reverently. We then moved into the adjoining *sala*, or saloon, where there was a profusion of English comestibles, in the shape of cold sirloin of beef, fowls, ham, etc., to which we did such honour as a sea appetite generally produces. It was rather distressing that not one of the entertainers touched any of these luxuries, it being the Greek Second or Panagia Lent, but fed entirely on some cold fish fried in oil, and green salad, of which last Lord Byron, in adherence to his rule of accustoming himself to eat anything eatable, partook, though with an obvious effort – as well as of the various wines that were on the table, particularly Ithaca, which is exactly port as made and drunk in the country of its growth.

'I was not antiquary enough to know to what object of antiquity our visit was made, but I saw Lord Byron in earnest conversation with a very antique old Greek monk in full clerical habit. He was a Bishop, sitting oil a stone of the ruined wall close by, and he turned out to be the *Esprit fort* mentioned in a note at the end of the second canto of "Childe Harold" – a freethinker, at least a freespeaker, when he called the sacrifice of the Maso *una Coglioneria*.

'When we embarked on our return to Vathi, Lord Byron seemed moody and sullen, but brightened up as he saw a ripple on the water, a mast and sail raised in the cutter, and Trelawny seated in the stern with the tiller in hand. In a few minutes we were scudding, gunwale under, in a position infinitely more beautiful than agreeable to landsmen, and Lord Byron obviously enjoying the not improbable idea of a swim for life. His motions, as he sat, tended to increase the impulse of the breeze, and tended also to sway the boat to leeward. "I don't know," he said, "if you all swim, gentlemen; but if you do, you will have fifty fathoms of blue water to support you; and if you do not, you will have it over you. But as you may not all be prepared, starboard, Trelawny – bring her up. There! she is trim; and now let us have a glass of grog after the gale. *Tita, i fiaschi!*" This was followed by a reproduction of the gin-and-water jars, and a round of the immortal swizzle. To my very great surprise, it was new to the company that the liquor which they were enjoying was the product of Scotland, in the shape of what is called "low-wines," or semi-distilled whisky – chiefly from the distillery of mine ancient friend, James Haig of Lochrin; but the communication seemed to gratify the noble drinker, and led to the recitation by one of the company, in pure lowland Scotch, of Burns's Petition to the House of Commons in behalf of the national liquor. The last stanza, beginning very much pleased Lord Byron, who said that he too was more than half a Scotchman.

"'Scotland, my auld respeckit mither,"

'The conversation again turned on the "Waverley Novels," and on this occasion Lord Byron spoke of "The Bride of Lammermoor," and cited the passage where the mother of the cooper's wife tells her husband (the cooper) that she "kent naething aboot what he might do to his wife; but the deil a finger shall ye lay on my dochter, and *that ye may foond upon*." Shortly afterwards, the conversation having turned upon poetry, his lordship mentioned the famous ode on the death of Sir John Moore as the finest piece of poetry in any language. He recited some lines of it. One of the company, with more presumption than wisdom, took him up, as his memory seemed to lag, by filling in the line:

> "'And he looked like a warrior taking his rest,
> With his martial cloak around him."

'Lord Byron, with a look at the interloper that spoke as if death were in it, and no death was sufficiently cruel for him, shouted, "He *lay*– he *lay* like a warrior, not he *looked*." The pretender was struck dumb, but, with reference to his lordship's laudation of the piece, he ventured half to whisper that the "Gladiator" was superior to it, as it is to any poetical picture ever painted in words. The reply was a benign look, and a flattering recognition, by a little applausive tapping of his tobacco-box on the board on which he sat.

'On arriving at Vathi, we repaired to our several rooms in the worthy citizens' houses where we were billeted, to read and meditate, and write and converse, as we might meet, indoors or out; and much profound lucubration took place among us, on the characteristics and disposition of the very eminent personage with whom we were for the time associated. Dr. Scott, the assistant-surgeon of the 8th Foot, who had heard of, though he may not have witnessed, any of the peculiarities of the great poet, accounted for them, and even for the sublimities of his poetry, by an abnormal construction or chronic derangement of the digestive organs – a theory which experience and observation of other people than poets afford many reasons to support:

> "'Is it not strange now – ten times strange – to think,
> And is it not enough one's faith to shatter,
> That right or wrong direction of a drink,
> A *plus* or *minus* of a yellow matter,
> One half the world should elevate or sink
> To bliss or woe (most commonly the latter) —
> That human happiness is well-formed chyle,
> And human misery redundant bile!"

'The next morning the accounts we heard of Lord Byron were contradictory: Trelawny, who slept in the next room to him, stating that he had been writing the greater part of the night, and he alleged it was the sixteenth canto of "Don Juan"; and Dr. Bruno, who visited him at intervals, and was many hours in personal attendance at his bedside, asserting that he had been seriously ill, and had been saved only by those *benedette pillule* which so often had had that effect. His lordship again appeared rowing in from his bath at the Lazzaretto, a course of proceeding (bathing

and boating) which caused Dr. Bruno to wring his hands and tear his hair with alarm and vexation.

'It was, however, the day fixed for our return to Cephalonia, and, having gladly assented to the proposition to join the suite, we all mounted ponies to cross the island to a small harbour on the south side, where a boat was waiting to bear us to Santa Eufemia, a Custom-house station on the coast of Cephalonia, about half an hour's passage from Ithaca, which we accordingly passed, and arrived at the collector's mansion about two o'clock.

'During the journey across the smaller island, I made a bold push, and succeeded in securing, with my small pony, the side-berth of Lord Byron's large brown steed, and held by him in the narrow path, to the exclusion of companions better entitled to the post. His conversation was not merely free – it was familiar and intimate, as if we were schoolboys meeting after a long separation. I happened to be "up" in the "Waverley Novels," had seen several letters of Sir Walter Scott's about his pedigree for his baronetage, could repeat almost every one of the "Rejected Addresses," and knew something of the *London Magazine* contributors, who were then in the zenith of their reputation – Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Talfourd, Browning, Allan Cunningham, Reynolds, Darley, etc. But his lordship pointed at the higher game of Southey, Gifford (whom he all but worshipped), Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh Review*, John Wilson, and other Blackwoodites. He said they were all infidels, as every man has a right to be; that Edinburgh was understood to be the seat of all infidelity, and he mentioned names (Dr. Chalmers and Andrew Thomson, for examples) among the clergy as being of the category. This I never could admit. He was particularly bitter against Southey, sneered at Wordsworth, admired Thomas Campbell, classing his "Battle of the Baltic" with the very highest of lyric productions. "Nothing finer," he said, "was ever written than —

> ""There was silence deep as death,
> And the boldest held his breath
> For a time."

'We arrived at one of the beautiful bays that encircle the island, like a wavy wreath of silver sand studded with gold and emerald in a field of liquid pearl, and embarked in the collector's boat for the opposite shore of Santa Eufemia, where, on arrival, we were received by its courteous chief, Mr. Toole, in a sort of state – with his whole establishment, French and English, uncovered and bowing. He had had notice of the illustrious poet's expected arrival, and had prepared one of the usual luxurious feasts in his honour – feasts which Lord Byron said "played the devil" with him, for he could not abstain when good eating was within his reach. The apartment assigned to us was small, and the table could not accommodate the whole party. There were, accordingly, small side or "children's tables," for such guests as might choose to be willing to take seats at them. "Ha!" said Lord Byron, "England all over – places for Tommy and Billy, and Lizzie and Molly, if there were any. Mr. – " (addressing me), "will you be my Tommy?" – pointing to the two vacant seats at a small side-table, close to the chair of our host. Down I sat, delighted, opposite to my companion, and had a *tête-à-tête* dinner apart from the head-table, from which, as usual, we were profusely helped to the most recherché portions. "Verily," said his lordship, "I cannot abstain." His conversation, however, was directed chiefly to his

host, from whom he received much local information, and had his admiration of Sir Thomas Maitland increased by some particulars of his system of government. There were no vacant apartments within the station, but we learned that quarters had been provided for us at a monastery on the hill of Samos, across the bay. Thither we were all transported at twilight, and ascended to the large venerable abode of some dozen of friars, who were prepared for our arrival and accommodation. Outside the walls of the building there were some open sarcophagi and some pieces of carved frieze and fragments of pottery.

'I walked with his lordship and Count Gamba to examine them, speculating philosophically on their quondam contents. Something to our surprise, Lord Byron clambered over into the deepest, and lay in the bottom at full length on his back, muttering some English lines. I may have been wrong, or idly and unjustifiably curious, but I leaned over to hear what the lines might be. I found they were unconnected fragments of the scene in "Hamlet," where he moralizes with Horatio on the skull:

> "'Imperious Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
> Might stop a hole to keep the wind away;
> O, that that earth, which held the world in awe,
> Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw!"

'As he sprang out and rejoined us, he said: "Hamlet, as a whole, is original; but I do not admire him to the extent of the common opinion. More than all, he requires the very best acting. Kean did not understand the part, and one could not look at him after having seen John Kemble, whose squeaking voice was lost in his noble carriage and thorough right conception of the character. Rogers told me that Kemble used to be almost always hissed in the beginning of his career. 'The best actor on the stage,' he said, 'is Charles Young. His Pierre was never equalled, and never will be.'" Amid such flying desultory conversation we entered the monastery, and took coffee for lack of anything else, while our servants were preparing our beds. Lord Byron retired almost immediately from the *sala*. Shortly afterwards we were astonished and alarmed by the entry of Dr. Bruno, wringing his hands and tearing his hair – a practice much too frequent with him – and ejaculating: "*O Maria, santissima Maria, se non è già morto – cielo, perchè non son morto io!*" It appeared that Lord Byron was seized with violent spasms in the stomach and liver, and his brain was excited to dangerous excess, so that he would not tolerate the presence of any person in his room. He refused all medicine, and stamped and tore all his clothes and bedding like a maniac. We could hear him rattling and ejaculating. Poor Dr. Bruno stood lamenting in agony of mind, in anticipation of the most dire results if immediate relief were not obtained by powerful cathartics, but Lord Byron had expelled him from the room by main force. He now implored one or more of the company to go to his lordship and induce him, if possible, to save his life by taking the necessary medicine. Trelawny at once proceeded to the room, but soon returned, saying that it would require ten such as he to hold his lordship for a minute, adding that Lord Byron would not leave an unbroken article in the room. The doctor again essayed an entrance, but without success. The monks were becoming alarmed, and so, in truth, were all present. The doctor asked me to try to bring his lordship to reason; "he will thank you when he is well," he said, "but get him to take this one

pill, and he will be safe." It seemed a very easy undertaking, and I went. There being no lock on the door, entry was obtained in spite of a barricade of chairs and a table within. His lordship was half undressed, standing in a far corner like a hunted animal at bay. As I looked determined to advance in spite of his imprecations of "Back! out, out of my sight! fiends, can I have no peace, no relief from this hell! Leave me, I say!" and he lifted the chair nearest to him, and hurled it direct at my head; I escaped as I best could, and returned to the *sala*. The matter was obviously serious, and we all counselled force and such coercive measures as might be necessary to make him swallow the curative medicine. Mr. Hamilton Browne, one of our party, now volunteered an attempt, and the silence that succeeded his entrance augured well for his success. He returned much sooner than expected, telling the doctor that he might go to sleep; Lord Byron had taken both the pills, and had lain down on my mattress and bedding, prepared for him by my servant, the only regular bed in the company, the others being trunks and portable tressels, with such softening as might be procured for the occasion. Lord Byron's beautiful and most commodious patent portmanteau bed, with every appliance that profusion of money could provide, was mine for the night.

'On the following morning Lord Byron was all dejection and penitence, not expressed in words, but amply in looks and movements, till something tending to the jocular occurred to enliven him and us. Wandering from room to room, from porch to balcony, it so happened that Lord Byron stumbled upon their occupants in the act of writing accounts, journals, private letters, or memoranda. He thus came upon me on an outer roof of a part of the building, while writing, as far as I recollect, these very notes of his conversation and conduct. What occurred, however, was not of much consequence – or none – and turned upon the fact that so many people were writing, when he, the great voluminous writer, so supposed, was not writing at all. The journey of the day was to be over the Black Mountain to Argostoli, the capital of Cephalonia. We set out about noon, struggling as we best could over moor, marsh ground, and water wastes. Lord Byron revived; and, lively on horseback, sang, at the pitch of his voice, many of Moore's melodies and stray snatches of popular songs of the time in the common style of the streets. There was nothing remarkable in the conversation. On arrival at Argostoli, the party separated – Lord Byron and Trelawny to the brig of the former, lying in the offing, the rest to their several quarters in the town.'

CHAPTER VI

After an absence of eight days the party returned to Argostoli, and went on board the *Hercules*. The messenger whom Byron had sent to Corfu brought the unwelcome intelligence that Mr. Blaquière had sailed for England, without leaving any letters for Byron's guidance. News also reached him that the Greeks were split up into factions, and more intent on persecuting and calumniating each other than on securing the independence of their country. This was depressing news for a man who had sacrificed so much, and would have damped the enthusiasm of most people in Byron's position; but it neither deceived nor disheartened him. He was, and had always been, prepared for the worst. He made up his mind not to enter personally into the arena of contending factions, but to await further developments at Cephalonia, hoping to acquire an influence which might eventually be employed in settling their internal discords. As he himself remarked, 'I came not here to join a faction, but a nation. I must be circumspect.' Trelawny, in his valuable record of events at this time, is hard on Byron. He mistook Byron's motives, and thought that he was 'shilly-shallying and doing nothing.' But Trelawny, though mistaken, was sincere. He was in every sense of the word a man of action, and full of a wild enthusiasm for the Greek cause. It was not in his nature to await events, but rather to create them, and Byron's wise decision made him restive. He determined to proceed to the Morea, and induced Hamilton Browne to go with him. Byron gave them letters to the Greek Government, if they could find any such authority, expressing his readiness to serve them when they had satisfied him how he could do so.

Gamba takes a calmer view of Byron's hesitation. He says that Byron well knew that prudence had never been in the catalogue of his virtues; that he knew the necessity of such a virtue in his present situation, and was determined to attain it. He carefully avoided every appearance of ostentation, and dreaded being suspected of being a mere hunter after adventures.

> 'By perseverance and discernment,' says Gamba, 'Byron hoped to assist in the liberation of Greece. To know and to be known was consequently, from the outset, his principal object.'

How far he succeeded we shall see later. From the time of Byron's arrival at Argostoli until September 6 he lived on board the *Hercules*. Colonel Napier had frequently begged him to take up his quarters with him, but Byron declined the hospitality; mainly because he feared that he might thereby embroil the British authorities on the island with their own Government, whose dispositions were yet unknown. Early in September Byron removed with Gamba to a village named Metaxata, in a healthy situation and amidst magnificent scenery. A month later letters arrived from Edward Trelawny, saying that things were not so bad as had been reported. It was evident that great apathy and total disorganization prevailed among those who had got the upper hand, but that the mass of the people – well disposed towards the revolution – was beginning to take an interest in the war. A general determination of never again submitting to the Turkish yoke had taken deep root. The existing Greek Government sent pressing letters to Byron inviting him to set out immediately, but Byron still thought it wiser not to move; for the reasons which had governed his conduct hitherto still prevailed. He was determined neither to waste his services nor his money on furthering the greed of some particular chieftain, or at best of some faction. Letters arrived from the Greek Committee in London, informing Byron that arrangements had been made for the floating of a Greek loan. Meanwhile Mavrocordato wrote to Byron from Hydra, whither he had fled, inviting him to that island. Lord Byron replied that so long as the dissensions between the factions continued he would remain a mere spectator, as he was resolved not to be mixed up in quarrels whose effects were so disastrous to the cause. He at the same time begged Mavrocordato to expedite the departure of the fleet, and to send the Greek deputies to London. The Turkish fleet meanwhile had sailed for the Dardanelles, leaving a squadron

of fourteen vessels for the blockade of Missolonghi, and for the protection of a fortress in the gulf, which was still in the hands of the Turks.

The gallant Marco Botzari had been killed in action, and Missolonghi was in a state of siege. Its Governor wrote and implored Byron to come there; but as the place was in no danger, either from famine or from assault, he declined the proposal.

In the middle of November, 1823, Mr. Hamilton Browne and the deputies arrived at Cephalonia. They brought letters from the Greek Government asking Byron to advance £6,000 (30,000 dollars) for the payment of the Greek fleet. An assurance was offered by the legislative body that, upon payment of this money, a Greek squadron would immediately put to sea. Byron consented to advance £4,000, and gave the deputies letters for London. In allusion to the loan about to be raised in England, he thus addressed them:

> 'Everyone believes that a loan will be the salvation of Greece, both as to its internal disunion and external enemies. But I shall refrain from insisting much on this point, for fear that I should be suspected of interested views, and of wishing to repay myself the loan of money which I have advanced to your Government.'

On December 17, 1823, while Byron was at Metaxata, awaiting definite information as to the progress of events, he resumed his journal, which had been abruptly discontinued in consequence of news having reached him that his daughter was ill.

> 'I know not,' he wrote, 'why I resume it even now, except that, standing at the window of my apartment in this beautiful village, the calm though cool serenity of a beautiful and transparent moonlight, showing the islands, the mountains, the sea, with a distant outline of the Morea traced between the double azure of the waves and skies, has quieted me enough to be able to write, which (however difficult it may seem for one who has written so much publicly to refrain) is, and always has been, to me a task, and a painful one. I could summon testimonies were it necessary; but my handwriting is sufficient. It is that of one who thinks much, rapidly, perhaps deeply, but rarely with pleasure.'

The Greeks were still quarrelling among themselves, and Byron almost despaired of being able to unite the factions in one common interest. Mavrocordato and the squadron from Hydra, for whose coming Byron had bargained when he advanced £4,000, had at length arrived after the inglorious capture of a small Turkish vessel with 50,000 dollars on board. This prize having been captured within the bounds of neutrality, on the coast of Ithaca, Byron naturally foresaw that it would bring the Greeks into trouble with the British authorities. Meanwhile, news from London confirmed the accounts of an increasing interest in the Greek cause, and gave good promise of a successful floating of the loan.

In the middle of November Colonel Leicester Stanhope arrived at Cephalonia. He had been deputed by the London Committee to act with Lord Byron. News also came from Greece that the Pasha of Scutari had abandoned Anatolico, and that the Turkish army had been put to flight. But the Greek factions, whose jealous dissensions promised to wreck the cause of Greek independence, had come to blows in the Morea.

As Byron had been recognized as a representative of the English and German Committees interested in the Greek cause, he was advised to write a public remonstrance to the general Government of Greece, pointing out that their dissensions would be fatal to the cause which it was presumed they all had at heart. Byron disliked to take so prominent a step, but he was eventually persuaded that such a letter might do a great deal of good. Gamba cites the following extract from Byron's appeal to the executive and legislative bodies of the Greek nation:

'Cephalonia,
'November 30, 1823.

'The affair of the loan, the expectation so long and vainly indulged of the arrival of the Greek fleet, and the danger to which Missolonghi is still exposed, have detained me here, and will still detain me till some of them are removed. But when the money shall be advanced for the fleet, I will start for the Morea, not knowing, however, of what use my presence can be in the present state of things. We have heard some rumours of new dissensions – nay, of the existence of a civil war. With all my heart, I pray that these reports may be false or exaggerated, for I can imagine no calamity more serious than this; and I must frankly confess, that unless union and order are established, all hopes of a loan will be vain. All the assistance which the Greeks could expect from abroad – an assistance neither trifling nor worthless – will be suspended or destroyed. And, what is worse, the Great Powers of Europe, of whom no one is an enemy to Greece, but seems to favour her establishment of an independent power, will be persuaded that the Greeks are unable to govern themselves, and will, perhaps, themselves undertake to settle your disorders in such a way as to blast the hopes of yourselves and of your friends.

'And allow me to add once for all – I desire the well-being of Greece, and nothing else, I will do all I can to secure it. But I cannot consent, I never will consent, that the English public or English individuals should be deceived as to the real state of Greek affairs. The rest, gentlemen, depends on you. You have fought gloriously; act honourably towards your fellow-citizens and towards the world. Then it will no more be said, as it has been said for two thousand years, with the Roman historian, that Philopœmen was the last of the Grecians. Let not calumny itself (and it is difficult, I own, to guard against it in so arduous a struggle) compare the patriot Greek, when resting from his labours, to the Turkish Pacha, whom his victories have exterminated.

'I pray you to accept these my sentiments as a sincere proof of my attachment to your real interests; and to believe that I am, and always shall be,
'Your, etc.,
'Noel Byron.'

Byron at the same time wrote to Prince Mavrocordato, and sent the letter by Colonel Leicester Stanhope. He tells the Prince that he is very uneasy at the news about the dissensions among the Greek chieftains, and warns him that Greece must prepare herself for three alternatives. She must either reconquer her liberty by united action, or become a Dependence of the Sovereigns of Europe; or, failing in either direction, she would revert to her position as a mere province of Turkey. There was no other choice open to her. Civil war was nothing short of ruin.

'If Greece desires the fate of Walachia and the Crimea,' says Byron, 'she may obtain it to-morrow; if that of Italy, the day after; but if she wishes to become truly Greece, free and independent, she must resolve to-day, or she will never again have the opportunity.'

Byron, in his journal dated December 17, 1823, says:

'The Turks have retired from before Missolonghi – nobody knows why – since they left provisions and ammunition behind them in quantities, and the garrison made no sallies, or none to any purpose. They never invested Missolonghi this year, but bombarded Anatoliko, near the Achelous.'

Finlay, in his 'History of Greece,' states that the Turks made no effort to capture the place, and after a harmless bombardment the siege was raised, and the Turkish forces retired into Epirus.

The following extract from a letter, which Byron wrote to his sister[13] conveys an unimpeachable record of his feelings and motives in coming to Greece:

> 'You ask me why I came up amongst the Greeks. It was stated to me that my doing so might tend to their advantage in some measure, in their present struggle for independence, both as an individual and as a member for the Committee now in England. How far this may be realized I cannot pretend to anticipate, but I am willing to do what I can. They have at length found leisure to quarrel amongst themselves, after repelling their other enemies, and it is no very easy part that I may have to play to avoid appearing partial to one or other of their factions… I have written to their Government at Tripolizza and Salamis, and am waiting for instructions *where* to proceed, for things are in such a state amongst them, that it is difficult to conjecture where one could be useful to them, if at all. However, I have some hopes that they will see their own interest sufficiently not to quarrel till they have received their national independence, and then they can fight it out among them in a domestic manner – and welcome. You may suppose that I have something to *think* of at least, for you can have no idea what an intriguing, cunning, unquiet generation they are; and as emissaries of all parties come to me at present, and I must act impartially, it makes me exclaim, as Julian did at his military exercises, "Oh! Plato, what a task for a Philosopher!"'

[13] 'Letters and Journals of Lord Byron,' edited by Rowland Prothero, vol. vi., p. 259.

CHAPTER VII

It was during the time that Byron was in the neighbourhood of Cephalonia that Dr. Kennedy, a Scottish medical man, methodistically inclined, undertook the so-called 'conversion' of the poet. Gamba tells us that their disputes on religious matters sometimes lasted five or six hours. 'The Bible was so familiar to Byron that he frequently corrected the citations of the theological doctor.'

Byron, in the letter from which we have quoted, says:

> 'There is a clever but eccentric man here, a Dr. Kennedy, who is very pious and tries in good earnest to make converts; but his Christianity is a queer one, for he says that the priesthood of the Church of England are no more Christians than "Mahound or Termagant" are… I like what I have seen of him. He says that the dozen shocks of an earthquake we had the other day are a sign of his doctrine, or a judgment on his audience, but this opinion has not acquired proselytes.'

As disputants, Byron and Kennedy stood far as the poles asunder. The former, while believing firmly in the existence and supreme attributes of God, doubted, but never denied, manifestations that could not be tested or demonstrated by positive proof. The latter, through blind unquestioning faith, believed in everything which an inspired Bible had revealed to mankind. Thus both were believers up to a certain point, and both were equally well-meaning and sincere. The intensity of their faith had its limitations. They did not agree, and never could have agreed, in their views of religion. They moved on parallel lines that might have been extended indefinitely, but could never meet. Kennedy discouraged the unlimited use of reason, and preferred an absolute reliance on the traditional teaching of his Church. To Byron the exercise of reason was an absolute necessity. He would not admit that God had given us minds, and had denied us the right to use them intelligently; or that the Almighty desired us to sacrifice reason to faith. 'It is useless,' said Byron, 'to tell me that I am to believe, and not to reason; you might as well say to a man: "Wake not, but sleep."' While Byron profoundly disbelieved in eternal punishments, Kennedy would have mankind kept straight by fear of them. Kennedy, though versed in the Bible, was, as events proved, hardly a match for Byron.

Hodgson, an old friend of Byron's, has left a record that a Bible presented to him 'by that better angel of his life,' his beloved sister, was among the books which Byron always kept near him. The following lines, taken from Scott, were inserted by Byron on the fly-leaf:

'Within this awful volume lies
The Mystery of Mysteries.
Oh! happiest they of human race
To whom our God has given grace
To hear, to read, to fear, to pray,
To lift the latch, and force the way;
But better had he ne'er been born
Who reads to doubt, or reads to scorn!'[14]

During the discussions which took place, Kennedy was forced to admit that Byron was well versed in the Bible; but he maintained that prayer was necessary in order to understand its message. Byron said that, in his opinion, prayer does not consist in the act of kneeling, or of repeating certain words in a solemn manner, as devotion is the affection of the heart.

[14] 'Memoir of Rev. F. Hodgson,' vol. ii., p. 150.

'When I look at the marvels of the creation,' said he, 'I bow before the Majesty of Heaven; and when I experience the delights of life, health, and happiness, then my heart dilates in gratitude towards God for all His blessings.'

Kennedy maintained that this was not sufficient; it must be an earnest supplication for grace and humility. In Kennedy's opinion Byron had not sufficient humility to understand the truths of the Gospel. At this time, certainly, Byron was not prepared to believe implicitly in the Divinity of Christ. He lacked the necessary faith to do so, but he did not reject the doctrine.

'I have not the slightest desire,' he said, 'to reject a doctrine without having investigated it. Quite the contrary; I wish to believe, because I feel extremely unhappy in a state of uncertainty as to what I am to believe.'

He wanted proofs – as so many others have before and since – and without it conviction was impossible.

> 'Byron,' said Countess Guiccioli, 'would never have contested absolutely the truth of any mystery, but have merely stated that, so long as the testimony of its truth was hidden in obscurity, such a mystery must be liable to be questioned.'

Byron had been brought up by his mother in very strict religious principles, and in his youth had read many theological works. He told Dr. Kennedy that he was in no sense an unbeliever who denied the Scriptures, or was content to grope in atheism, but, on the contrary, that it was his earnest wish to increase his belief, as half-convictions made him wretched. He declared that, with the best will in the world, he could not understand the Scriptures. Kennedy, on the other hand, took the Bible to be the salvation of mankind, and was strong in his condemnation of the Catholic Church. He objected to the Roman Communion as strongly as he repudiated and despised Deism and Socinianism.

Byron had at this time a decided leaning towards the Roman Communion, and, while deploring hypocrisies and superstitions, deeply respected those who believed conscientiously, whatever that belief might be. He loathed hypocrites of all kinds, and especially hypocrites in religion.

'I do not reject the doctrines of Christianity,' he said; 'I only ask a few more proofs to profess them sincerely. I do not believe myself to be the vile Christian which so many assert that I am.'

Kennedy advised Byron to put aside all difficult subjects – such as the origin of sin, the fall of man, the nature of the Trinity, the doctrine of predestination, and kindred mysteries – and to study Christianity by the light of the Bible alone, which contains the only means of salvation. We give Byron's answer in full on Dr. Kennedy's authority:

> 'You recommend what is very difficult; for how is it possible for one who is acquainted with ecclesiastical history, as well as with the writings of the most renowned theologians, with all the difficult questions which have agitated the minds of the most learned, and who sees the divisions and sects which abound in Christianity, and the bitter language which is often used by the one against the other; how is it possible, I ask, for such a one not to inquire into the nature of the doctrines which have given rise to so much discussion? One Council has pronounced against another; Popes have belied their predecessors, books have been written against other books, and sects have risen to replace other sects. The Pope has opposed the Protestants, and the Protestants the Pope. We have heard of Arianism, Socinianism, Methodism, Quakerism, and numberless other sects. Why have these existed? It is a puzzle for the brain; and does it not, after all, seem safer to say: "Let us be neutral: let those fight who will, and when they have settled which is the best religion, then shall we also begin to study it." I like your way of thinking, in many respects; you make short work of decrees and Councils, you reject all which is not in harmony with the Scriptures. You do not admit of theological works filled with Latin and Greek, of both High and Low Church; you would even suppress many abuses which

> have crept into the Church, and you are right; but I question whether the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Scotch Presbyterians would consider you their ally.'

Kennedy, in reply, alluded to the differences which existed in religious opinions, and expressed regret at this, but pleaded indulgence for those sects which do not attack the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. He strongly condemned Arianism, Socinianism, and Swedenborgianism, which were anathema to him.

'You seem to hate the Socinians greatly,' said Byron, 'but is this charitable? Why exclude a Socinian, who believes honestly, from any hope of salvation? Does he not also found his belief upon the Bible? It is a religion which gains ground daily. Lady Byron is much in favour with its followers. We were wont to discuss religious matters together, and many of our misunderstandings have arisen from that. Yet, on the whole, I think her religion and mine were much alike.'

Whether Byron was justified in this opinion or not may be seen from a letter which Lady Byron wrote to Mr. Crabb Robinson[15] in reference to Dr. Kennedy's book:

> 'Strange as it may seem, Dr. Kennedy is most faithful where you doubt his being so. Not merely from casual expressions, but from the whole tenor of Lord Byron's feelings, I could not but conclude he was a believer in the inspiration of the Bible, and had the gloomiest Calvinistic tenets. To that unhappy view of the relation of the creature to the Creator, I have always ascribed the misery of his life… It is enough for me to remember, that he who thinks his transgressions beyond *forgiveness* (and such was his own deepest feeling) *has* righteousness beyond that of the self-satisfied sinner; or, perhaps, of the half awakened. It was impossible for me to doubt, that, could he have been at once assured of pardon, his living faith in a moral duty and love of virtue ("I love the virtues which I cannot claim") would have conquered every temptation. Judge, then, how I must hate the Creed which made him see God as an Avenger, not a Father. My own impressions were just the reverse, but could have little weight, and it was in vain to seek to turn his thoughts for long from that *idée fixe*, with which he connected his physical peculiarity as a stamp. Instead of being made happier by any apparent good, he felt convinced that every blessing would be "turned into a curse" for him. Who, possessed of such ideas, could lead a life of love and service to God or man? They must in a measure realize themselves. "The worst of it is I *do* believe," he said. I, like all connected with him, was broken against the rock of Predestination.'

Lady Byron writes from her own personal experience of a time when tender affection or sympathy formed no part of Byron's nature; of a time when he had no regard for the interests or the happiness of others; when he lived according to his own humours, and when his will was his law. Byron's earlier poetry amply supports Lady Byron's view of so miserable a state of mind. But there is reason to hope – nay, we might say to believe – that, in the last years of his life, Byron began to realize that a merciful God would be wholly incapable of such manifest injustice as to condemn His creatures to suffer for crimes which they were powerless to resist and predestined to commit. He believed in God and in the immortality of the soul, and has publicly declared that all punishment which is to revenge, rather than to correct, must be morally wrong. 'Human passions,' wrote Byron, 'have probably disfigured the Divine doctrines here: but the whole thing is inscrutable.'

Countess Guiccioli tells us that, whatever may have been Byron's opinions with regard to certain points of religious doctrine, sects, and modes of worship, in essential matters his mind never seriously doubted. Matthews in his Cambridge days, and Shelley towards the close of life, moved him not at all. Between the commencement of Byron's career and its close, his mind passed successively through

[15] 'Diary,' vol. iii., pp. 435, 436.

different phases before arriving at the last result. Leicester Stanhope, who was at Missolonghi with Byron, and who knew him well latterly, says:

> 'Most persons assume a virtuous character. Lord Byron's ambition, on the contrary, was to make the world imagine that he was a sort of Satan, though occasionally influenced by lofty sentiments to the performance of great actions. Fortunately for his fame, he possessed another quality, by which he stood completely unmasked. He was the most ingenuous of men, and his nature, in the main good, always triumphed over his acting.'

Parry, who stood at Byron's bedside when he died at Missolonghi, tells us that Byron died fearless and resigned. Could there be a better proof than these words, spoken by Byron a few hours before he passed away? —

> 'Eternity and space are before me; but on this subject, thank God, I am happy and at ease. The thought of living eternally, of again reviving, is a great pleasure. Christianity is the purest and most liberal religion in the world; but the numerous teachers who are eternally worrying mankind with their denunciations and their doctrines are the greatest enemies of religion. I have read, with more attention than half of them, the Book of Christianity, and I admire the liberal and truly charitable principles which Christ has laid down. There are questions connected with this subject which none but Almighty God can solve. Time and Space, who can conceive? None but God: on Him I rely.'

During the time that Byron lived at Metaxata, in Cephalonia, he seldom saw anyone in the evening except Dr. Stravolemo, one of the most estimable men in the island, who lived in that village. He had been first physician to Ali Pacha. He was an entertaining man, and afforded Byron much amusement by disputing with Dr. Bruno on medical questions.

> 'Lord Byron,' says Gamba, 'had generally three or four books lying before him, of which he read first one, then the other, and used to contrive to foment those friendly contentions, which, however, never exceeded the proper bounds. Lord Byron's favourite reading consisted of Greek history, of memoirs, and of romances. Never a day passed without his reading some pages of Scott's novels. His admiration of Walter Scott, both as a writer and as a companion, was unbounded. Speaking of him to his English friends, he used to say: "You should know Scott; you would like him so much; he is the most delightful man in a room; no affectation, no nonsense; and, what I like above all things, nothing of the author about him."'

One evening Colonel Napier, the British Resident, arrived at Byron's house at a gallop, and asked for Drs. Bruno and Stravolemo. He said that a party of peasants who were road-making had, in excavating a high bank, fallen under a landslide and were in danger of their lives. There were at least a dozen persons entombed. Colonel Napier happened to be passing at the moment when the catastrophe occurred; help was urgently needed. Byron sent Dr. Bruno to their assistance, while he and Gamba followed as soon as their horses could be saddled.

> 'When we came to the place,' says Gamba, 'we saw a lamentable spectacle indeed. A crowd of women and children were assembled round the ruins, and filled the air with their cries. Three or four of the peasants who had been extricated were carried before us half dead to the neighbouring cottages; and we found Mr. Hill, a friend of Lord Byron, and the superintendent of the works, in a state of the utmost consternation. Although an immense crowd continued flocking to the place, and it was thought that there were still some other workmen under the fallen mass of earth, no one would make any further efforts. The Greeks stood looking on without

> moving, as if totally indifferent to the catastrophe, and despaired of doing any good. This enraged Lord Byron; he seized a spade, and began to work as hard as he could; but it was not until the peasants had been threatened with the horsewhip that they followed his example. Some shoes and hats were found, but no human beings. Lord Byron never could be an idle spectator of any calamity. He was peculiarly alive to the distress of others, and was perhaps a little too easily imposed upon by every tale of woe, however clumsily contrived. The slightest appearance of injustice or cruelty, not only to his own species, but to animals, roused his indignation and compelled his interference, and personal consequences never for one moment entered into his calculations.'

In the month of December the Greek squadron anchored off Missolonghi, where Prince Mavrocordato was received with enthusiasm. He was given full powers to organize Western Greece. The Turkish squadron was at this time shut up in the Gulf of Lepanto.

Byron sent to inform Mavrocordato that the loan which he had promised to the Government was ready, and that he was prepared either to go on board some vessel belonging to the Greek fleet, or to come to Missolonghi and confer with him. Mavrocordato and Colonel Leicester Stanhope wrote to beg Byron to come as soon as possible to Missolonghi, where his presence would be of great service to the cause. In the first place money to pay the fleet was much wanted; the sailors were on the verge of mutiny. Mavrocordato was in a state of anxiety, the Greek Admiral looked gloomy, and the sailors grumbled aloud.

> 'It is right and necessary to tell you,' wrote Stanhope, 'that a great deal is expected of you, both in the way of counsel and money. If the money does not arrive soon, I expect that the remaining five ships (the others are off) will soon make sail for Spezia. All are eager to see you. They calculate on your aiding them with resources for their expedition against Lepanto, and hope that you will take about 1,500 Suliotes into your pay for two or three months. Missolonghi is swarming with soldiers, and the Government has neither quarters nor provisions for them. I walked along the street this evening, and the people asked me after Lord Byron. Your further delay in coming will be attended with serious consequences.'

Byron at the same time received a letter from the Legislative Council, begging him to co-operate with Mavrocordato in the organization of Western Greece. It was now December 26, 1823. Byron chartered a vessel for part of the baggage; a mistico, or light fast-sailing vessel, for himself and his suite; and a larger vessel for the horses, baggage, and munitions of war. The weather was unfavourable and squally, the vessels could not get under-weigh, and the whole party were detained for two days, during which time Byron lodged with his banker, Mr. Charles Hancock, and passed the greater part of the day in the society of the British authorities of the island.

We are able, through the courtesy of General Skey Muir, the son of Byron's friend at Cephalonia, to give extracts from a letter which Mr. Charles Hancock wrote to Dr. Muir on June 1, 1824. During Byron's residence at Metaxata, Dr. Muir was the principal medical officer at Cephalonia, and it was in his house that some of the conversations on religion between Dr. Kennedy and Byron were held. Mr. Charles Hancock writes:

> 'The day before Byron left the island I happened to receive a copy of "Quentin Durward," which I put into his hands, knowing that he had not seen it, and that he wished to obtain the perusal of it. Lord Byron was very fond of Scott's novels – you will have observed they were always scattered about his rooms at Metaxata. He immediately shut himself in his room, and, in his eagerness to indulge in it, refused to dine with the officers of the 8th Regiment at their mess, or even to join us at table, but merely came out once or twice to say how much he was entertained, returning

> to his chamber with a plate of figs in his hand. He was exceedingly delighted with "Quentin Durward" – said it was excellent, especially the first volume and part of the second, but that it fell off towards the conclusion, like all the more recent of these novels: it might be, he added, owing to the extreme rapidity with which they were written – admirably conceived, and as well executed at the outset, but hastily finished off…
>
> 'I will close these remarks with the mention of the period when we took our final leave of him. It was on the 29th December last that, after a slight repast, you and I accompanied him in a boat, gay and animated at finding himself embarked once more on the element he loved; and we put him on board the little vessel that conveyed him to Zante and Missolonghi. He mentioned the poetic feeling with which the sea always inspired him, rallied you on your grave and thoughtful looks, me on my bad steering; quizzed Dr. Bruno, but added in English (which the doctor did not understand), "He is the most sincere Italian I ever met with"; and laughed at Fletcher, who was getting well ducked by the spray that broke over the bows of the boat. The vessel was lying sheltered from the wind in the little creek that is surmounted by the Convent of San Constantino, but it was not till she had stood out and caught the breeze that we parted from him, to see him no more.'

The wind becoming fair, on December 28, at 3 p.m., the vessels got under way, Byron in the mistico, Pietro Gamba in the larger vessel. On the morning of the 29th they were at Zante, and spent the day in transacting business with Mr. Barff and shipping a considerable sum of money. Byron declined the Commandant's invitation to his residence, as his time was fully occupied with the business in hand. At about six in the evening they sailed for Missolonghi, without the slightest suspicion that the Turkish fleet was on the lookout for prizes. They knew that the Greek fleet was lying before Missolonghi, and they expected to sight a convoy sent out to meet them. Gamba says:

> 'We sailed together till after ten at night, with a fair wind and a clear sky; the air was fresh but not sharp. Our sailors sang patriotic songs, monotonous indeed, but to persons in our situation extremely touching. We were all, Lord Byron particularly, in excellent spirits. His vessel sailed the fastest. Then the waves parted us, and our voices could no longer reach each other. We made signals by firing pistols and carabines, and shouted, "To morrow we meet at Missolonghi – to morrow!"
>
> 'Thus, full of confidence and spirit, we sailed along. At midnight we were out of sight.'

At 6.30 a.m. the vessel which bore Gamba along gaily approached the rocks which border the shallows of Missolonghi. They saw a large vessel bearing down upon them, which they at first took for one of the Greek fleet; in appearance it seemed superior to a Turkish man-of-war. But as Gamba's vessel hoisted the Ionian flag, to their dismay the stranger hoisted the Ottoman ensign. The Turkish commander ordered Gamba's captain to come on board, and the poor fellow gave himself up for lost. They could think of no excuse which would have any weight with their captors, and were in some trepidation as to Byron's fate, he having money, arms, and some Greeks, with him.

Writing from Missolonghi on January 5, 1824, Colonel Stanhope says:

> 'Count Gamba has just arrived here, with all the articles belonging to the Committee. He was taken early in the morning by a Turkish ship. The captain thereof ordered the master on board. The moment he came on deck, the captain drew his dazzling sabre and placed himself in an attitude as if to cut his head off, and at the same time asked him where he was bound. The frightened Greek said, to Missolonghi. They gazed at each other, and all at once the Turk recognized in his prisoner one who, on a former occasion, had saved his life. They embraced. Next

> came Count Gamba's turn. He declared – swore that he was bound to Calamata, and that the master had told a lie through fear, and that his bill of lading would bear him out. They were both taken to the castle of the Morea, were well treated, and after three days released.'

On January 5, 1824, Byron arrived at Missolonghi. He was received with military honours and popular applause.

> 'He landed,' says Gamba, 'in a Speziot boat, dressed in a red uniform. He was in excellent health, and appeared moved by the scene. I met him as he disembarked, and in a few minutes we entered the house prepared for him – the same in which Colonel Stanhope resided. The Colonel and Prince Mavrocordato, with a long suite of Greek and European officers, received him at the door. I cannot describe the emotions which such a scene excited. Crowds of soldiery and citizens of every rank, sex, and age, were assembled to testify their delight. Hope and content were pictured on every countenance.'

Byron seems to have escaped from perils quite as great, though differing in nature, from those through which Gamba had passed. His vessel passed close to the Turkish frigate, but under favour of the night, and by preserving complete silence, the master ran her close under the rocks of the Scrofes, whither the Turk dared not follow her. Byron saw Gamba's vessel taken and conducted to Patras. Byron, thinking it wiser not to make straight for Missolonghi steered for Petala; but finding that port open and unsafe, his vessel was taken to Dragomestri, a small town on the coast of Acarnania. On his arrival there, Byron was visited by the Primates and officers of the place, who offered him their good offices. From this place Byron sent messengers both to Zante and Missolonghi. On receipt of Byron's letter, Mavrocordato sent five gunboats and a brig-of-war to escort him to Missolonghi. On January 4, the flotilla was caught in a violent storm, which threw Byron's vessel in dangerous proximity to the rocks on that inhospitable coast. The sailors at first behaved remarkably well, and got the vessel off the rocks; but a second squall burst upon them with great violence, and drove the Mistico into dangerous waters, causing the sailors to lose all hope of saving her. They abandoned the vessel to her fate, and thought only of their own safety. But Byron persuaded them to remain; and by his firmness, and no small share of nautical skill, not only got the crew out of danger, but also saved the vessel, several lives, and 25,000 dollars, the greater part of which was in hard cash. Byron does not seem to have pulled off his clothes since leaving Cephalonia.

It was an adventurous voyage – appropriately so – for it was his last journey in this world.

CHAPTER VIII

At the beginning of the war, Missolonghi consisted of about 800 scattered houses, built close to the seaside on a muddy and most unhealthy site, scarcely above the level of the waters, 'which a few centuries ago must have covered the spot, as may be judged from the nature of the soil, consisting of decomposed seaweed and dried mud.' The population was exceedingly poor, and amounted to nearly 3,000 souls. The town had a most uninviting appearance; the streets were narrow and badly paved. But, says Millingen, what most revolted a stranger was the practice of having the buildings so constructed that the most loathsome substances were emptied into the streets. The inhabitants were so accustomed to this abominable state of things that they ridiculed the complaints of strangers, and even swore at people who ventured to suggest reform. Missolonghi must indeed have been a wretched place even for a strong man in his full powers and vitality – for Byron it was nothing short of Death! Trelawny tells us that this place is situated on the verge of a dismal swamp. The marvel to him was that Byron, who was always liable to fevers, should have consented to live three months on this mud-bank, shut in by a circle of stagnant pools 'which might be called the belt of death.' When Trelawny arrived in the early spring, he found most of the strangers suffering from gastric fevers. He waded through the streets, 'between wind and water,' to the house where Byron had lived – a detached building on the margin of the shallow, slimy sea-waters.

Such, then, was the residence which was destined to be the last home of the author of 'Childe Harold!'

Byron had scarcely reached the modest apartment which had been assigned to him, when he was greeted by the tumultuous visits of the Primates and chiefs. All the chieftains of Western Greece – that is to say, the mountainous districts occupied by the Greeks – were now collected at Missolonghi in a general assembly, together with many of the Primates of the same districts. Mavrocordato, at that time Governor-General of the province, was President of the Assembly, with a bodyguard of 5,000 armed men. The first object of this assembly, says Gamba, was to organize the military forces, the assignment of the soldiers' pay, and the establishment of the national constitution and some regular form of government for Western Greece. The chieftains were not all of them well disposed towards Mavrocordato; the soldiers were badly paid – in fact, hardly paid at all; and so great was the fear of disturbances, quarrels, and even of a civil war, that without the influence of Prince Mavrocordato, and the presence of Byron with his money, there could have been no harmony.

After the departure of the Turks, who had blockaded Missolonghi, there was a general feeling of security, and no one expected them to return before the spring. The Peloponnesus, with exception of the castles of the Morea and of Patras, of Modon and of Covon, was in the hands of the Greeks. The northern shore of the Gulf of Lepanto, with the exception of the two castles, were also in Greek hands. They swayed Bœotia and Attica, together with the whole isthmus of Corinth.

Such was the state of affairs when Byron arrived on that dismal swamp. The position in which he found himself required much skill and tact; for the dissension among the various leaders in other parts of Greece was in its bitterest phase, and public opinion everywhere was dead against the executive body. It would have been fatal to the prestige of Byron if, in a moment of impetuosity, he had cast in his lot with some particular faction. It was his fixed intention, as it was clearly his best policy, to reconcile differences, and to bring the contending factions closer together. His influence amongst all parties was daily increasing, and everyone believed that Byron would eventually be able to bring discordant voices into harmony, and pave the way for the formation of a strong, patriotic Government. He faced the situation bravely, and closed his ears to the unworthy squabbles of ambitious cliques. He made arrangements, with the best assistance at hand, to turn the expected loan from England to the best account, in order to insure the freedom and independence of Greece.

The first day of his arrival at Missolonghi was signalized by an act of grace. A Turk, who had fallen into the hands of some Greek sailors, was released by Byron's orders, and, having been clothed and fed at his own expense, was given quarters at Byron's house until an opportunity occurred of sending him in freedom to Patras. About a fortnight later, hearing that four Turkish prisoners were at Missolonghi in a state of destitution, Byron caused them to be set at liberty, and sent them to Usouff Pacha at Patras, with a letter which, though it has been often printed, deserves a place in this narrative:

> 'Highness!
>
> 'A vessel, in which a friend and some domestics of mine were embarked, was detained a few days ago, and released by order of your Highness. I have now to thank you, not for liberating the vessel, which as carrying a neutral flag, and being under British protection, no one had a right to detain, but for having treated my friends with so much kindness while they were in your hands.
>
> 'In the hope that it may not be altogether displeasing to your Highness, I have requested the Governor of this place to release four Turkish prisoners, and he has humanely consented to do so. I lose no time, therefore, in sending them back, in order to make as early a return as I could, for your courtesy on the late occasion. These prisoners are liberated without any conditions; but should the circumstance find a place in your recollection, I venture to beg that your Highness will treat such Greeks as may henceforth fall into your hands, with humanity; more especially as the horrors of war are sufficiently great in themselves, without being aggravated by wanton cruelties on either side.
>
> 'Noel Byron.
>
> 'Missolonghi,
>
> '*January 23, 1824.*'

This letter was the keynote of Byron's policy during the remainder of his life. The horrors of war were sufficient in themselves without that unnecessary cruelty so often exhibited by Eastern nations in their treatment of prisoners of war.

The following account of an incident connected with Byron's clemency to a prisoner pictures the state of things at Missolonghi.

> 'This evening,' says Gamba, 'whilst Mavrocordato was with Lord Byron, two sailors belonging to the privateer which had taken the Turk came into the room, demanding in an insolent tone that their prisoner should be delivered up to them. Lord Byron refused; their importunity became more violent, and they refused to leave the room without their Turk (such was their expression) on which Lord Byron, presenting a pistol at the intruders, threatened to proceed to extremities unless they instantly retired. The sailors withdrew, but Byron complained to Mavrocordato of his want of authority, and said to him: "If your Government cannot protect me in my own house, I will find means to protect myself." From that time Lord Byron retained a Suliote guard in his house.'

During the winter preparations were being made for an expedition against Lepanto, a fortress which, if captured by the Greeks, would facilitate the siege of Patras. Its fortifications were constructed on the slope of a hill, forming a triangle, the base of which was close to the sea. Its walls were of Venetian construction, but without ditches. As portions of its walls were commanded by a neighbouring hill, its siege would have proved a very arduous undertaking even with regular troops; but with raw Greek levies its reduction, except by famine, would have been almost impossible. On January 14, 1824, Colonel Stanhope writes to Mr. Bowring in the following terms: 'Lord Byron has taken 500 Suliotes into pay. He burns with military ardour and chivalry, and will proceed with the expedition to Lepanto.' Circumstances were, however, against this expedition from the very

beginning. Great hopes had been entertained by Lord Byron and by Colonel Stanhope that the Suliotes would conform to discipline, and that Mr. Parry, who had been sent out by the Greek Committee with stores and ammunition, would on his arrival organize the artillery, and manufacture Congreve rockets – a projectile of which the Turks were said to be in great awe.

Parry arrived at Missolonghi early in February, on board the brig *Anna*, which had been chartered by the London Greek Committee. He brought cannons, ammunition, printing-presses, medicines, and all the apparatus necessary for the establishment of a military laboratory. Several English mechanics came with him, and some English, German, and Swedish gentlemen, who wished to serve the Greek cause.

Mr. (or, as he was afterwards called) Major, Parry was a peculiar person in every way. He had at one time served as a shipwright, then as Firemaster in the King's service, and won favour with Byron through his buffoonery and plain speaking – two very useful qualifications in environments of stress and duplicity. When Byron appointed him Major in the Artillery Brigade, the best officers in the brigade tendered their resignations, stating that, while they would be proud to serve under Lord Byron, neither their honour nor the interests of the service would allow them to serve under a man who had no practical experience of military evolutions. The German officers also, who had previously served in the Prussian army, appealed against Parry's appointment, and offered proofs of his ignorance of artillery. But Byron would not listen to complaints, which he attributed partly to jealousy and partly to German notions of etiquette, which seemed to him to be wholly out of place in a country where merit rather than former titles should regulate such appointments.

In supporting Parry against these officers, Byron was in a measure influenced by the recommendations of both the Greek Committee who sent him out, and of Colonel Leicester Stanhope, who at that time considered Parry to be an exceedingly capable officer. Perhaps, if Parry had not appeared on parade in an apron, brandishing a hammer, and if he had not asserted himself so extravagantly, he might possibly have passed muster. But tact and modesty were not in Parry's line; and having boasted to the London Committee that he was acquainted with almost every branch of military mechanics, he bullied its members into a belief that his pretentions were well founded. As a matter of fact, Parry proved to be unsuited for high command, although it must be admitted that he worked indefatigably. He made plans for the erection of a laboratory, and presided over the works. He paved the yard of the Seraglio, repaired the batteries, instructed the troops in musketry and gunnery; he gave lessons with the broadsword, inspected the fortifications, and directed the operations of Cocchini, the chief engineer. He repaired gun-carriages, and put his hand to anything wanted, so that it appeared as if really nothing could be done without him. In one thing only did Parry seem to fall short of general expectation. He had boasted that he knew the composition of 'Congreve rockets.' With this mighty instrument of mischief he prophesied that the Greeks would be able to paralyze all the efforts of their enemy, both by land and sea. The Turkish cavalry, the only arm against which the Greeks were impotent, would be rendered useless, and the Turkish vessels, by the same means, would be easily destroyed.

Unfortunately, the manufacture of these rockets was impossible without the assistance of the English mechanics whom he had brought with him, and these men were unable to work without materials, which were not obtainable. Thus the principal part of Parry's 'stock-in-trade' – his rockets, incendiary kites, and improved Grecian fires – were not forthcoming.

For a long time the roads in the neighbourhood of Missolonghi were so broken up by incessant rain that Byron could not ride or take any outdoor exercise. This affected his health. His only means of getting a little fresh air was by paddling through the murky waters in a sort of canoe. During these expeditions, says Gamba, who always accompanied him, he spoke often of his anxiety to begin the campaign. He had not much hope of success, but felt that something must be done during these tedious months, if only to employ the troops and keep them from creating disturbances in the town.

> 'I am not come here in search of adventures,' said Byron, 'but to assist the regeneration of a nation, whose very debasement makes it more honourable to become their friend. Regular troops are certainly necessary, but not in great numbers: regular troops alone would not succeed in a country like Greece; and irregular troops alone are only just better than nothing. Only let the loan be raised; and in the meantime let us try to form a strong national Government, ready to apply our pecuniary resources, when they arrive, to the organization of troops, the establishment of internal civilization, and the preparations for acting defensively now, and on the offensive next winter. Nothing is so insupportable to me as all these minute details and these repeated delays. But patience is indispensable, and that I find the most difficult of all attainments.'

It was Byron's custom to spend his evenings in Colonel Stanhope's room, with his English comrades. Sometimes the Germans would join the party, play on their flutes, and sing their national airs to the accompaniment of a guitar. Byron was fond of music in general, and was especially partial to German music, particularly to their national songs.

Millingen tells us that in the evening all the English who had not, with Colonel Stanhope, turned Odysseans assembled at Byron's house, and enjoyed the charm of his conversation till late at night. Byron's character, says Millingen,

> 'differed so much from what I had been induced to imagine from the relations of travellers, that either their reports must have been inaccurate, or his character must have totally changed after his departure from Genoa. It would be difficult, indeed impossible, to convey an idea of the pleasure his conversation afforded. Among his works, that which may perhaps be more particularly regarded as exhibiting the mirror of his conversation, and the spirit which animated it, is "Don Juan." He was indeed too open, and too indiscreet in respect to the reminiscences of his early days. Sometimes, when his vein of humour flowed more copiously than usual, he would play tricks on individuals. Fletcher's boundless credulity afforded him an ever-ready fund of amusement, and he one evening planned a farce, which was as well executed and as laughable as any ever exhibited on the stage. Having observed how nervous Parry had been, a few days before, during an earthquake, he felt desirous of renewing the ludicrous sight which the fat, horror-struck figure of the Major had exhibited on that occasion. He placed, therefore, fifty of his Suliotes in the room above that where Parry slept, and towards midnight ordered them to shake the house, so as to imitate that phenomenon. He himself at the same time banged the doors, and rushed downstairs, delighted to see the almost distracted Major imploring tremblingly the mercy of heaven.'

Lord Byron was very much taken with Parry, whose drolleries relieved the tedium and constant vexations incidental to the situation at Missolonghi. The Major appears to have been an excellent mimic, and possessed a fund of quaint expressions that made up for the deficiency of real wit. Millingen says that he could tell, in his coarse language, a good story, and could play Falstaff's, or the part of a clown very naturally. He ranted Richard III.'s or Hamlet's soliloquies in a mock-tragic manner like a player at Bartholomew Fair, which made everyone laugh, and beguiled the length of many a rainy evening.

On January 21, 1824, Missolonghi was blockaded by the Turkish fleet. There were neither guns nor even sailors fit to man the gunboats; the only chance was to make a night attack upon the Turks in boats manned by the European volunteers then residing at Missolonghi. Byron took the matter in hand, and insisted on joining personally in the expedition. He was so determined on this project that Mavrocordato and others, realizing the folly of exposing so valuable a life on so desperate an

enterprise, dissuaded Byron from risking his valuable life in a business for which there were already sufficient volunteers. As things turned out, it did not much matter, for the Turkish fleet suddenly abandoned the blockade and returned to the gulf.

On January 22, while Colonel Stanhope and some friends were assembled, Byron came from his bedroom and said, with a smile: 'You were complaining the other day that I never write any poetry now: this is my birthday, and I have just finished something, which, I think, is better than what I usually write.' He then produced those affecting verses on his own birthday which were afterwards found written in his journal, with the following introduction: 'January 22: on this day I complete my thirty-sixth year.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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