

JOHN WILLIAM POLIDORI

THE DIARY OF DR. JOHN
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*The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori / 1816, Relating to Byron, Shelley,
etc.:*

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William Polidori / 1816,
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*"Mi fur mostrati gli spiriti magni
Che del vederli in me stesso n'esalto.*

—Dante.

INTRODUCTION

A person whose name finds mention in the books about Byron, and to some extent in those about Shelley, was John William Polidori, M.D.; he was Lord Byron's travelling physician in 1816, when his Lordship quitted England soon after the separation from his wife. I, who now act as Editor of his Diary, am a nephew of his, born after his death. Dr. Polidori figures not very advantageously in the books concerning Byron and Shelley. He is exhibited as overweening and petulant, too fond of putting himself forward face to face with those two heroes of our poetical literature, and too touchy when either of them declined to take him at his own estimation. I will allow that this judgment of Polidori is, so far as it goes, substantially just; and that some of the recorded anecdotes of him prove him deficient in self-knowledge, lacking prudence and reserve, and ignoring the distinction between a dignified and a quarrelsome attitude of mind. He was, in fact, extremely young when he went abroad in April 1816 with Byron, to whom he had been recommended by Sir Henry Halford; he was then only twenty years of age (born on September 7, 1795), Byron being twenty-eight, and Shelley twenty-three. The recommendation given to so very young a man is a little surprising. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Polidori was without some solid attainments, and some considerable share of talent. He was the son of Gaetano

Polidori, a Tuscan man of letters who, after being secretary to the celebrated dramatist Alfieri, had settled in London as a teacher of Italian, and of his English wife, a Miss Pierce; the parents (my maternal grand-parents) survived to a great age, only dying in 1853. John Polidori, after receiving his education in the Roman Catholic College of Ampleforth (Yorkshire), studied medicine in Edinburgh, and took his doctor's degree at a singularly early age—I believe almost unexampled—the age of nineteen. His ambition was fully as much for literary as for professional distinction; and he published, besides *The Vampyre* to which I shall have to recur, a prose tale named *Ernestus Berchtold*, a volume of verse containing a drama entitled *Ximenes*, and some other writings.

One of these writings is the text to a volume, published in 1821, entitled *Sketches Illustrative of the Manners and Costumes of France, Switzerland, and Italy*, by R. Bridgens. The name of Polidori is not indeed recorded in this book, but I know as a certainty that he was the writer. One of the designs in the volume shows the costume of women at Lerici just about the time when Shelley was staying there, in the closing months of his life, and a noticeable costume it was. Polidori himself—though I am not aware that he ever received any instruction in drawing worth speaking of—had some considerable native gift in sketching faces and figures with lifelike expression; I possess a few examples to prove as much. The Diary shows that he took some serious and intelligent interest in works of art, as well as

in literature; and he was clearly a rapid and somewhat caustic judge of character—perhaps a correct one. He was a fine, rather romantic-looking young man, as evidenced by his portrait in the National Portrait Gallery, accepted from me by that Institution in 1895.

Dr. Polidori's life was a short one. Not long after quitting Lord Byron in 1816 he returned to London, and in Norwich continued his medical career, but eventually relinquished this, and began studying for the Bar. It is said that Miss Harriett Martineau was rather in love with him in Norwich. In August 1821 he committed suicide with poison—having, through losses in gambling, incurred a debt of honour which he had no present means of clearing off. That he did take poison, prussic acid, was a fact perfectly well known in his family; but it is curious to note that the easy-going and good-naturedly disposed coroner's jury were content to return a verdict without eliciting any distinct evidence as to the cause of death, and they simply pronounced that he had "died by the visitation of God."

The matter was reported in two papers, *The Traveller* and *The New Times*. I possess a copy, made by my mother at the time, of the reports; and it may perhaps be as well inserted here.

Copied from The Traveller

Monday Evening [August 27th, 1821].

Melancholy Event.—Mr. Polidori, residing in Great Pulteney Street, retired to rest about his usual time on Thursday night; the servant, not finding him rise at the usual hour yesterday, went to his room between eleven and twelve o'clock, and found him groaning, and apparently in the last agonies of death. An alarm was given and medical aid was immediately called, but before the arrival of Surgeons Copeland and Davies, he was no more. His father was at the time on his journey to London to see his son, and arrived about three hours after the event. We understand the deceased was about twenty-six years of age, and had for some time accompanied Lord Byron in Italy. A Coroner's Inquest will sit this day to ascertain the cause of his death.

Copied from The New Times

Tuesday [September 11th, 1821].

Coroner's Inquest on John Polidori, Esquire.—An Inquisition has been taken before T. Higgs, Esquire, Deputy Coroner, at the residence of the father of the above unfortunate gentleman, in Great Pulteney Street, Golden Square, who was discovered lying on his bed in a state nearly approaching to death, and soon afterwards expired.

Charlotte Reed, the servant to Mr. Gaetano Polidori, the father of the deceased, said her master's son lived in the house, and for some time had been indisposed. On Monday the 20th

of August last he returned from Brighton, since which his conduct manifested strong symptoms of incoherence, and he gave his order for dinner in a very strange manner. On the Thursday following the deceased dined with a gentleman residing in the same house, and on that occasion he appeared very much depressed in his spirits. About nine o'clock the same evening he ordered witness to leave a glass (tumbler) in his room; this was unusual, but one was placed as he desired. Deceased told her he was unwell; if therefore he did not get up by twelve o'clock the next day, not to disturb him. Witness, however, a few minutes before twelve, went into his room to open the shutters, and on her return saw the deceased lying in bed; he was not in any unusual position, but seemed extremely ill. Witness immediately left the room, went upstairs, and communicated what she had observed to a gentleman, who instantly came down. Witness then went for medical assistance. The deceased was about twenty-six years of age.—Mr. John Deagostini, the gentleman alluded to by the last witness, corroborated her statement on his giving him the invitation to dine, which he accepted in a way quite different from his usual conduct. Witness also observed that, some time since, the deceased had met with an accident—was thrown out of his gig, and seriously hurt in the head. On Thursday at dinner he spoke in half sentences; the conversation was on politics and a future state. The deceased observed rather harshly that witness would see more than him; he appeared to be deranged in his mind, and his countenance was haggard. At

dinner he ate very little: soon after left the room, but joined again at tea; hardly spoke a word, and retired at nine o'clock. After breakfast next morning, witness inquired of the servant whether Mr. Polidori had gone out. She replied no, and that he had desired her not to disturb him. About twelve o'clock the servant came to him very much alarmed. Witness went immediately to the apartment of the deceased, and observed a tumbler on the chair, which contained nothing but water, and did not perceive any deleterious substance that the deceased might have taken; he was senseless, and apparently in a dying state.—Mr. Thomas Copeland, a surgeon residing in Golden Square, was sent for suddenly to attend the deceased, and attempted to discharge the contents of the stomach without effect. He lingered for about ten minutes, and expired. Another medical gentleman soon after arrived, but his assistance was also unavailing.—There being no further evidence adduced to prove how the deceased came to his death, the jury, under these circumstances, returned a verdict of—Died by the visitation of God.

Medwin, in his *Conversations with Lord Byron*, gives the following account of how the poet received the news of Dr. Polidori's death. "I was convinced" (said Byron) "something very unpleasant hung over me last night: I expected to hear that somebody I knew was dead. So it turns out—poor Polidori is gone. When he was my physician he was always talking of prussic acid, oil of amber, blowing into veins, suffocating by charcoal, and compounding poisons; but for a different purpose to what

the Pontic monarch did, for he has prescribed a dose for himself that would have killed fifty Mithridates—a dose whose effect, Murray says, was so instantaneous that he went off without a spasm or struggle. It seems that disappointment was the cause of this rash act."—The evidence of the servant at the inquest shows that death did not come so very suddenly; and in my own family I always heard the poison spoken of as simply prussic acid.

This is all that I need say at present to explain who Dr. Polidori was; but I must add a few words regarding his Diary.

The day when the young doctor obtained the post of travelling physician to the famous poet and man of fashion, Lord Byron, about to leave England for the Continent, must, no doubt, have been regarded by him and by some of his family as a supremely auspicious one, although in fact it turned out the reverse. The article on Polidori written in *The Dictionary of National Biography* by my valued friend, the late Dr. Garnett, speaks of him as "physician and *secretary* to Lord Byron"; but I never heard that he undertook or performed any secretarial work worth speaking of, and I decidedly believe that he did not. The same statement occurs in the inscription on his likeness in the National Portrait Gallery. Polidori's father had foreseen, in the Byronic scheme, disappointment as only too likely, and he opposed the project, but without success. To be the daily companion and intimate of so great a man as Byron, to visit foreign scenes in his society, to travel into his own father's native land, which he regarded with a feeling of enthusiasm, and with

whose language he was naturally well acquainted, to be thus launched upon a career promising the utmost development and satisfaction to his literary as well as professional enterprise—all this may have seemed like the realization of a dream almost too good to be true. To crown all, Mr. Murray, Byron's publisher, had offered Polidori no less a sum than £500 (or 500 guineas) for an account of his forthcoming tour. Polidori therefore began to keep a Diary, heading it *Journal of a Journey through Flanders etc., from April 24, 1816, to _____*; and the blank was eventually filled in with the date "December 28, 1816"; it should rather stand "December 30." Portions of the Diary are written with some detail, and a perceptible aim at literary effect—Murray's £500 being manifestly in view; in other instances the jottings are slight, and merely enough for guiding the memory. On this footing the Journal goes on up to June 30, 1816. It was then dropped, as Polidori notes "through neglect and dissipation," for he saw a great deal of company. On September 5 he wrote up some summarized reminiscences; and from September 16, the day when he parted company with Byron at Cologny, near Geneva, and proceeded to journey through Italy on his own account, he continued with some regularity up to December 30, when he was sojourning in Pisa. That is the latest day of which any record remains; but it is known from other evidence that Dr. Polidori continued in Italy up to April 14, 1817: he then left Venice in company with the new Earl of Guilford and his mother—being their travelling physician. Whether the Journal is in any

fair degree interesting or brightly written is a question which the reader will settle for himself; as a document relevant to the life of two illustrious poets, it certainly merits some degree of attention.

My own first acquaintance with the Diary of Dr. Polidori dates back to 1869, when I was preparing the Memoir of Shelley which preludes my edition of his poems, published in 1870; I then availed myself of the Shelleian information contained in the Diary, and even gave two or three verbatim extracts from it. The MS. book was at that time the property of a sister of his, Miss Charlotte Lydia Polidori, a lady of advanced age. I regret to say that my aunt, on receiving the MS. back from me, took it into her head to read it through—a thing which I fancy she had never before done, or certainly had not done for very many years, and that she found in it some few passages which she held to be "improper," and, with the severe virtue so characteristic of an English maiden aunt, she determined that those passages should no longer exist. I can remember one about Byron and a chambermaid at Ostend, and another, later on, about Polidori himself. My aunt therefore took the trouble of copying out the whole Diary, minus the peccant passages, and she then ruthlessly destroyed the original MS. After her death—which occurred in January 1890, when she had attained the age of eighty-seven years—her transcript came into my possession. Its authority is only a shade less safe than that of the original, and it is from the transcript that I have had to work in compiling my present volume.

I will now refer in some detail to the matter of Dr. Polidori's romantic tale, *The Vampyre*; not only because this matter is of some literary interest in itself, but more especially because the account of it given in *The Dictionary of National Biography* treats Polidori, in this regard, with no indulgence, and I believe (however unintentionally on the part of the late Dr. Garnett) with less than justice. He says: "In April 1819 he [Polidori] published in *The New Monthly Magazine*, and also in pamphlet-form, the celebrated story of *The Vampyre*, which he attributed to Byron. The ascription was fictitious. Byron had in fact, in June 1816, begun to write at Geneva a story with this title, in emulation of Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*; but dropped it before reaching the superstition which it was to have illustrated. He sent the fragment to Murray upon the appearance of Polidori's fabrication, and it is inserted in his works. He further protested in a carelessly good-natured disclaimer addressed to *Galignani's Messenger*."

The facts of the case appear to be as follows. As we shall see in the Diary, Polidori began, near Geneva, a tale which (according to Mrs. Shelley) was about a "skull-headed lady," and he was clearly aware that Byron had commenced a story about a vampyre. After quitting Byron, Polidori, in conversation with the Countess of Breuss, mentioned in his Journal, spoke (unless we are to discredit his own account) of the subject of the great poet's tale; the Countess questioned whether anything could be made of such a theme, and Polidori then tried his hand at carrying it out. He left the MS. with the Countess, and thought little or

no more about it. After his departure from that neighbourhood some person who was travelling there (one might perhaps infer a lady) obtained the MS. either from the Countess of Breuss or from some person acquainted with the Countess: this would, I suppose, be the Madame Gatelier who is named in the Journal along with the Countess. The traveller then forwarded the tale to the Publisher, Colburn, telling him—and this statement was printed by Colburn as an *Extract of a Letter from Geneva*—that certain tales were "undertaken by Lord B[yron], the physician [Polidori], and Miss M. W. Godwin," and that the writer received from her female friend "the outline of each of these stories." She did not say that the completed *Vampyre* was the production of Byron; but Colburn inferred this, and in the magazine he attributed it to Byron, printing his name as author.

Among the papers which were left by Dr. Polidori at the time of his death, and which have come into my possession, are the drafts of two letters of his—one addressed to Mr. Henry Colburn, and the other to the Editor of *The Morning Chronicle*. These letters were actually dispatched, and (having no sort of reason to suspect the contrary) I assume that they contain a truthful account of the facts. If so, they exonerate Polidori from the imputation of having planned or connived at a literary imposture. In his letter to Mr. Colburn he affirms (as will be seen) that the following incidents in his tale were borrowed from Byron's project: the departure of two friends from England, one of them dying in Greece [but it is in fact near Ephesus] after

exacting from his companion an oath not to mention his death; the revival of the dead man, and his then making love to the sister of his late companion. The story begun by Byron and published along with *Mazeppa* contains the incidents above named, except only the important incident of the dead man's revival and his subsequent love-making. Byron's extant writing, which is a mere fragment, affords no trace of that upshot; but Polidori must have known that such was the intended sequel. It may be added that the resemblance between these productions of Byron and of Polidori extends only to incidents: the form of narrative is different.

I proceed to give the letter of Dr. Polidori to Mr. Colburn, followed by the letter to the Editor of *The Morning Chronicle*. This latter goes over a good deal of the same ground as the letter to Colburn, so I shorten it very considerably.

John Polidori to Henry Colburn

[London], April 2 (1819).

Sir,

I received a copy of the magazine of last April (the present month), and am sorry to find that your Genevan correspondent has led you into a mistake with regard to the tale of *The Vampyre*—which is *not* Lord Byron's, but was written *entirely* by me at the request of a lady, who (upon my mentioning that his Lordship had said that it was his intention of writing a

ghost story, depending for interest upon the circumstances of two friends leaving England, and one dying in Greece, the other finding him alive, upon his return, and making love to his sister) saying that she thought it impossible to work up such materials, desired I would write it for her, which I did in two idle mornings by her side. These circumstances above mentioned, and the one of the dying man having obtained an oath that the survivor should not in any way disclose his decease, are the only parts of the tale belonging to his Lordship. I desire, therefore, that you will positively contradict your statement in the next number, by the insertion of this note.

With regard to my own tale, it is imperfect and unfinished. I had rather therefore it should not appear in the magazine; and, if the Editor had sent his communication, as he mentions, he would have been spared this mistake.

But, sir, there is one circumstance of which I must request a further explanation. I observe upon the back of your publication the announcement of a separate edition. Now, upon buying this, I find that it states in the title-page that it was entered into Stationers' Hall upon March 27, consequently before your magazine was published. I wish therefore to ask for information how this tale passed from the hands of your Editor into those of a publisher.

As it is a mere trifle, I should have had no objection to its appearing in your magazine, as I could, in common with any other, have extracted it thence, and republished it. But I

shall not sit patiently by and see it taken without my consent, and appropriated by any person. As therefore it must have passed through your hands (as stated in the magazine) from a correspondent, I shall expect that you will account to me for the publishers, Messrs. Sherwood and Neely, having possession of it and appropriating it to themselves; and demand either that a compensation be made me, or that its separate publication be instantly suppressed.

Hoping for an immediate answer, which will save me the trouble of obtaining an injunction, I remain,

Sir,

*Your obedient servant,
John Polidori.*

To the Editor of *The Morning Chronicle*

Sir,

As you were the first person to whom I wrote to state that the tale of *The Vampyre* was not Lord Byron's, I beg you to insert the following statement in your paper.... The tale, as I stated to you in my letter, was written upon the foundation of a purposed and begun story of Lord Byron's.... Lord Byron, in a letter dated Venice, stated that he knew nothing of the Vampyre story, and hated vampyres; but, while this letter was busily circulating in all the London and provincial papers, the fragment at the end

of *Mazeppa* was in the hands of his publishers in Albemarle Street, with the date of June 17, 1816, attached to it, being the beginning of his tale upon this very foundation. My development was written on the Continent, and left with a lady at whose request it was undertaken; in the course of three mornings by her side it was produced, and left with her. From her hands, by means of a correspondent, without my knowledge, it came into those of the Editor of *The New Monthly*, with a letter stating it to be an *ébauche* of Lord Byron's. Mr. Watts, as Editor of that magazine, stated in *his* notice that the tale which accompanies the letters "we also present to our readers without pledging ourselves for its authenticity as the production of Lord Byron"; and he continues, "We should suppose it to have been committed to paper rather from the recital of a third person." This, however, after the publication of 700 copies, was cancelled by the *publisher*, and another notice inserted stating it to be decidedly his Lordship's, in direct opposition (as I am informed) to the Editor's will—who has since retired from the conduct of the magazine.

Immediately it was published I procured a copy; and, upon finding that it was an almost forgotten trifle of my own, instantly wrote to you as Editor of *The Morning Chronicle*, stating the little share Lord Byron had in the work. This was upon the Friday evening after its publication. I at the same time wrote to the publishers of the tale in its separate form, and to those of the magazine, to stop its sale under his Lordship's name. On Monday the publishers of the magazine called upon me, and promised it

should be instantly announced as mine.... When I came to claim my share in the profits, I was offered £30, instead of nearly £300....

*Your obedient servant,
John Polidori.*

The prefatory note to *The Vampyre*, in *The New Monthly Magazine*, runs thus: "We received several private letters in the course of last autumn from a friend travelling on the Continent, and among others the following, which we give to the public on account of its containing anecdotes of an individual concerning whom the most trifling circumstances, if they tend to mark even the minor features of his mind, cannot fail of being considered important and valuable by those who know how to appreciate his erratic but transcendent genius. The tale which accompanied the letter we have also much pleasure in presenting to our readers.—Ed." There is also a final note thus: "We have in our possession the tale of Dr. —, as well as the outline of that of Miss Godwin. The latter has already appeared under the title of *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. The former, however, upon consulting with its author, we may probably hereafter give to our readers.—Ed."

Two questions arise as to that prefatory note: (1) Did the Editor really write it, or did the Publisher Colburn write it? (2) Is the averment true or false that the Editor (or the Publisher) had received in the course of the preceding autumn "several private letters" from the same person who had now forwarded a letter

enclosing *The Vampyre*?

Murray wrote to Lord Byron on April 27, 1819. He speaks of the publication of *The Vampyre* in *The New Monthly Magazine*, and afterwards in book-form, and proceeds: "The Editor of that journal has quarrelled with the Publisher, and has called this morning to exculpate himself from the baseness of the transaction. He says that he received it from Dr. Polidori for a small sum; Polidori averring that the whole plan of it was yours, and that it was merely written out by him. The Editor inserted it with a short statement to this effect; but, to his astonishment, Colburn cancelled the leaf.... He informs me that Polidori, finding that the sale exceeded his expectation and that he had sold it too cheap, went to the Editor and declared that he would deny it."

This statement by Murray makes it probable that the paragraph purporting to come from the Editor, or some substantial part of it, really emanated from the Publisher, and the same is definitely asserted in Polidori's letter to *The Morning Chronicle*; but Murray's letter does not settle the question whether the allegation about a traveller at Geneva was true or false. The Editor's assertion that "he received it from Dr. Polidori for a small sum" does not by any means clear up all the facts. It seems quite possible that there really was a correspondent at Geneva who sent to the Editor the MS. of *The Vampyre*, along with that of Polidori's other tale, and an outline of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as expressly affirmed in the final note

signed "Ed."; and that the Editor, having no right to publish *The Vampyre* unless by authority of its writer, spoke to Polidori about it. How could Polidori dispose of it "for a small sum" if he alleged that it was written by Byron, or by any one other than himself? He averred "that the whole plan of it was" Byron's—and this is apparently true; adding "that it was merely written out by" himself—in the sense not of having written from Byron's dictation, but of having composed a story founded upon Byron's intended incidents. Murray's final phrase—that Polidori "went to the Editor, and declared that he would deny it"—is loosely expressed, but seems to mean that he would deny Byron's authorship of *The Vampyre*—and so in fact he did.

If we suppose (as did Murray apparently) that Polidori had in the first instance planned a deliberate imposture, and had palmed off upon the Editor *The Vampyre* as being virtually the writing of Byron, we are encountered by three difficulties left unexplained: (1) What plea could Polidori advance for having the MS. and the right of publishing it? (2) Why did he sell for "a *small* sum" a work which, if written by the world-famous Lord Byron, would be worth a very considerable sum? (3) Why did the Editor pay to Polidori a sum, whether small or large, for a book which, according to this assumption, was avowedly not the writing of himself, but the writing and property of Byron? All these difficulties are avoided, and no other serious difficulties arise, if we assume that the account given by Polidori is the true one, viz. that he offered the tale to the Editor as being his

own composition, strictly modelled upon a series of incidents invented by Byron.

Polidori's letter, addressed to the Editor of *The Morning Chronicle*, was, as I have already said, delivered to the office of that paper. It was not however published there, as Messrs. Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, the publishers of *The Vampyre* in its book-form, represented to Polidori that the appearance of such a letter would tend to compromise them, and he therefore, out of consideration for this firm, withdrew the letter unprinted. This is Polidori's own statement, contained in the Introduction to another romantic tale of his, *Ernestus Berchtold*, published in 1819; being the tale by Polidori which, as stated by the Editor of *The New Monthly Magazine*, had been sent to him along with *The Vampyre* and the outline of *Frankenstein*. Besides all this, the Doctor wrote a brief letter, published in *The Courier* on May 5, 1819, saying—what was clearly the fact—"Though the groundwork is certainly Lord Byron's, its development is mine."

I must now revert for a moment to the "skull-headed lady." In the Introduction above named, Polidori asserts that that tale, *Ernestus Berchtold*, was the one which he began at Cologne. It does not contain any sort of mention of any skull-headed lady. There is some supernatural machinery in the story, of a rather futile kind; it could be excluded without affecting the real basis of the narrative, which relates the love-affair and marriage of a young Swiss patriot with a lady who is ultimately identified as his sister. As to Mrs. Shelley's allegation that the (non-existent)

skull-headed lady was punished for "peeping through a keyhole," no such incident exists in *Ernestus Berchtold*; there is, however, a passage where a certain Julia seeks to solve a mystery by looking "through the wainscot of a closet for wood." Her head, after this inspection, remains exactly what it was before.

The Vampyre was in its way a great success. As stated in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Byron's name gave Polidori's production great celebrity on the Continent, where *The Vampyre* was held to be quite the thing which it behoved Byron to have written. It formed the groundwork of Marschner's opera, and nearly half a volume of Dumas's *Memoirs* is occupied by an account of the representation of a French play founded upon it.

THE DIARY

1816. *April 24.*—I left London at 10 in the morning, with Lord Byron, Scrope Davies, Esq., and J. Hobhouse, Esq.

[Mr. Scrope Berdmore Davies had been one of Byron's fellow-students and intimates at Cambridge University, and had continued familiar with him at Newstead Abbey and elsewhere. He has been described as "no less remarkable for elegance of taste than for a generous high-mindedness." Mr. John Cam Hobhouse (afterwards Sir J. C. Hobhouse, and ultimately Lord Broughton de Gifford) was, it need hardly be said, a peculiarly close friend of Byron. He had accompanied him in his travels in Greece prior to the commencement of *Childe Harold*, wrote notes to that poem, and to the last upheld the essential fineness of his Lordship's character. Byron's intention to travel along with Hobhouse in the spring of 1816 was not a new project conceived in consequence of his separation, only completed on April 22, from his wife. He had entertained this scheme before his daughter Ada was born on December 10, 1815, and had announced it to his wife, to whom the notion was not agreeable.]

The view from Shooter's Hill was extensive and beautiful, being on a much larger scale than the view from Stirling.

[Polidori mentions Stirling, as being no doubt a reminiscence of his own, from the days when he had been in Edinburgh to take his medical degree.]

The plain, enamelled with various colours according to the different growth of the corn, spread far before our sight, was divided irregularly by the river. The Thames next, with its majestic waves, flowed in the plain below, bearing numerous fleets upon its flood. Its banks in many parts were beautiful. The chalky banks were alternated with the swelling hills, rising from the waves, of the pleasing green-brown, the effect of the first dawn of spring on the vegetable creation.

At Canterbury we saw the Cathedral. I know not how it was, whether my mind had been prepared by the previous sight of glorious nature to receive pleasing impressions, but the spot where the high altar and Thomas à Becket's tomb stood seemed to me one of the most beautiful effects that I had ever seen arising from Saxo-Gothic architecture; for, though it had not all the airiness and awe-inspiring height that I had seen in other cathedrals, yet its simple beauty pleased me more than anything I had yet seen.

Remounting, we soon arrived at Dover, where we slept, when the packet-boat captain had sufficiently disturbed us.

April 25.—This day was spent at Dover. The greater part was occupied in procuring what had been neglected in London, and in seeing the carriage well packed up. After dinner, however, we went in search of Churchill's tomb, raised, we had learned, to his memory by his friend Wilkes. Arrived at the house of the sexton, he led us to a ruined church, passing through which we came into a churchyard, where children, heedless and unconscious of

what they trampled on, sportively ran amid the raised turf graves. He pointed out to us a tombstone, undistinguished from those of the tradesmen near him, having merely, like them, a square tablet stuck into the ground, whereon was written, "Here lie the remains of the celebrated Churchill.

"Life to the last enjoyed, here Churchill lies.

Candidate."

[By Churchill.] The green turf was beginning already to decay upon his tomb, which when the sexton heard us lamenting he assured us that his grave, as well as the rest, would be newly decked as soon as Nature had vested its fullest green—for that was an old custom. Churchill owed, then, only to a common hand what the pride of a friend refused—the safety of his burial-place. Wilkes only sought the gratification of his vanity. While he consigned his friend's last relics to the keeping of a tablet, he consigned his own pride in such a friend to the keeping of a column in his own grounds. Yet I do not know whether the scene was not more moving, though no vainly pompous inscription pointed out the spot where this poet was buried.

There were two authors; one, the most distinguished of his age; another, whose name is rising rapidly; (and a third, ambitious for literary distinction). What a lesson it was for them when, having asked the sexton if he knew why so many came to see this tomb, he said: "I cannot tell; I had not the burying of

him."

[Byron, after settling in the Villa Diodati near Geneva, recorded this same incident in a composition entitled *Churchill's Grave, a Fact Literally Rendered*. He wrote a memorandum to say that in this poem he had intentionally imitated the style of Wordsworth, "its beauties and its defects." The composition therefore is essentially un-Byronic in method, and perhaps Wordsworth would not have recognized in it many of his own "beauties." The lines are as follows—

"I stood beside the grave of him who blazed
The comet of a season, and I saw
The humblest of all sepulchres, and gazed
With not the less of sorrow and of awe
On that neglected turf and quiet stone,
With name no clearer than the names unknown
Which lay unread around it. And I ask'd
The gardener of that ground why it might be
That for this plant strangers his memory task'd,
Through the thick deaths of half a century.
And thus he answered: 'Well, I do not know
Why frequent travellers turn to pilgrims so:
He died before my day of sextonship,
And I had not the digging of this grave.'
And is this all? I thought; and do we rip
The veil of immortality, and crave
I know not what of honour and of light
Through unborn ages, to endure this blight

So soon and so successless? As I said,
The architect of all on which we tread
(For earth is but a tombstone) did essay
To extricate remembrance from the clay
Whose minglings might confuse a Newton's thought,
Were it not that all life must end in one,
Of which we are but dreamers. As he caught
As 'twere the twilight of a former sun,
Thus spoke he: 'I believe the man of whom
You wot, who lies in this selected tomb,
Was a most famous writer in his day;
And therefore travellers step from out their way
To pay him honour;—and myself whate'er
Your honour pleases.' Then most pleased I shook
From out my pocket's avaricious nook
Some certain coins of silver, which (as 'twere
Perforce) I gave this man—though I could spare
So much but inconveniently. Ye smile
(I see ye, ye profane ones, all the while)
Because my homely phrase the truth would tell.
You are the fools, not I; for I did dwell
With a deep thought and with a softened eye
On that old sexton's natural homily,
In which there was obscurity and fame—
The glory and the nothing of a name."

Charles Churchill the satirist, a clergyman who had given up his standing in the Church, had died in 1764 at Boulogne, aged only thirty-three. It is clear that his renown was still considerable

in 1816; it is now barely more than a literary reminiscence.]

We then returned home, where, having delivered my play into their hands, I had to hear it laughed at—(an author has always a salvo) partly, I think, from the way in which it was read. One of the party, however—to smoothe, I suppose, my ruffled spirits—took up my play, and apparently read part with great attention, drawing applause from those who before had laughed. He read on with so much attention that the others declared he had never been so attentive before.

[Further on it would appear that this play was named *Cajetan*. I know nothing about it. The name Cajetan is in Italian Gaetano, which was the Christian name of Polidori's father.]

I afterwards went out, and did a very absurd thing, which I told; and found I had not only hurt myself but might possibly hurt others for whom I cared much more.

April 26.—We embarked at 9 o'clock, much hurried, with three servants.

[This means, to judge from a published letter by Byron, 9 o'clock on the evening of April 25. The three servants were Berger (a Swiss), William Fletcher, and Robert Rushton. Mr. Davies and Mr. Hobhouse, it will be understood, remained ashore.]

When at a distance, we waved our hands and hats, bidding adieu. The wind was completely in our teeth, but we made the passage in sixteen hours. The coast of Dover is very striking, though miserably barren-looking. The cliff is steep, though not

such as Shakespear paints. The castle—at a distance, which is the only way I viewed it—is miserable. Sailing from England, I for a long time kept my eye upon its stern white cliffs, thinking on her who bade me join her remembrance with the last sight of my native soil.

[This points pretty clearly to a love-passage, perhaps a matrimonial engagement. As a fact Polidori never married. The lady may possibly have been Eliza Arrow, a relative in India, with whom he, at a rather earlier date, had interchanged various letters.]

They at last faded from my sight, and all on board looked dreary; the sea dashed over us, and all wore an aspect of grief. Towards night a most beautiful spectacle was seen by myself, who alone remained on deck. The stars shedding merely a twilight enabled me to see the phosphoric light of the broken foam in all its splendour. But the most beautiful moment was that of its first appearance: no sound around save the sullen rushing of the vessel, and the hoarse cries of the heaving sailor; no light save a melancholy twilight, which soothed the mind into forgetfulness of its grief for a while—a beautiful streak following the lead through the waves. We arrived at Ostend at 2 o'clock in the morning.

[Polidori's chronology is a little confusing here. If the party left Dover at 9 p.m. on April 25, and took sixteen hours in the sea-passage, they must have reached Ostend at 1 in the *afternoon*. There is also a confusion immediately afterwards, for he repeats

the date for which he has already accounted, viz.]

April 26.—We passed through the gates, paying a franc a head, and went to the Cour Impériale. We were astonished at the excellent inn and good treatment, except that I got a dreadful headache from the smell of paint in my bedroom, and that the tea was perfumed.

[It was, I believe, at this point of the narrative that my aunt Charlotte Polidori cut out a peccant passage. I seem to remember the precise diction of it, which was this: "As soon as he reached his room, Lord Byron fell like a thunderbolt upon the chambermaid." Such at any rate was the substance of the statement. The other statement which my aunt excluded came somewhat further on, when Dr. Polidori was staying near Geneva. He gave some account of a visit of his to some haunt of the local Venus Pandemos. I think the police took some notice of it. The performance was not decorous, but was related without any verbal impropriety.]

Arising in the morning, I went upon a stroll round the town. Saw little girls of all ages with head-dresses; books in every bookseller's window of the most obscene nature; women with wooden shoes; men of low rank basking in the sun as if that would evaporate their idleness. The houses generally good old style, very like a Scotch town, only not quite so filthy. Very polite custom-house officers, and very civil waiters. Fine room painted as a panorama, all French-attitudinized. Went into a shop where no one spoke French. Tried German; half-a-dozen women

burst out laughing at me. Luckily for myself, in a good humour; laughed with them. Obligated to buy two books I did not want, because I let a quarto fall upon a fine girl's head while looking at her eyes. Coaches of the most horrid construction; apparently some fine horses, others small. Fortifications look miserable. Once stood a fine siege, when 40,000 on one side and 80 on the other fed fowls and manured the fields. What for? For religion? No—for money. *There* was the spring of all. As long as only religion and rights were affected, bigoted religionists and wild republicans were alone concerned; but a step too far, and all was ruined.

[The allusion here is to the great siege of Ostend, 1601 to 1604.]

We set off at 3, with four horses. Postillion with boots to his hips, nankeens, leather hat with quaker brim, only neatly rounded with black riband; a blue and red coat, joined to which a most rascally face, with lips that went a few lines beyond the brim of his hat. A dreadful smacker of his whip, and a driver of four horses from the back of one of the hindermost. We were obliged to hire a calèche to send with our luggage. The rascal made us pay three times too much at each of his barriers; but, after having (on account of the horses not being ready at the next post) gone beyond his beat, he allowed the toll-keepers to be honest, and only take a few centimes instead of a franc. The country very flat, highly cultivated; sand, no waste. Roads paved in the middle, with trees on each side. Country,

from the interspersion of houses, spires, cottages, etc., delightful; everything comfortable, no appearance of discontent.

We got out of our carriage at a place where the horses ate bread and hay, and walked on to a church-yard, where we found no tombstones, no funeral-pomp, no flattering eulogy, but simply a wooden cross at each grave's head and foot. On the side of the church-steeple, at a little height, was made a niche wherein statues formed a crucifixion, as an object to excite reverence and adoration of God in every passenger. We passed on, and arrived at Bruges at the fall of the evening. Our passports were dispensed with on our mentioning that we were not stopping. We entered one of the most beautiful towns I ever saw; every house seemed substantial—had some ornament either of fretwork or lines—all seem clean and neat. We stopped at the post. We were shown into the postmaster's parlour on our asking for something to eat—well furnished—better even than a common middleman's house in London. N.B.—Everywhere 6 francs for a bottle of Rhenish. Women generally pretty. Flemish face has no divinity—all pleasing more than beautiful—a sparkling eye in a full round. Their pictures of every age have the mark of their country.

As we went from Bruges, twilight softened all the beauty, and I do not know how to describe the feeling of pleasure we felt in going through its long roof-fretted streets, bursting on to spots where people were promenading amidst short avenues of trees. We passed on. At the gates I saw a boy with sand in his hand let it through his fingers laughingly, heedless of the myriads whose

life hung upon each sand. We passed on at 10. We came to a village where we heard the sound of music. The innkeeper, on our enquiring what it was, asked us politely in to hear a concert of amateurs. We descended, and were gratified and surprised at hearing, in a village of 5000 souls, a full band playing difficult though beautiful music. One march particularly struck us. But what was our surprise, when the door opened, to view the group: none apparently above the rank of labourers, yet they met three times a week. In our country the amusement is to reel drunk as many. There was one figure manifestly consumptive, yet he was blowing an enormous trombone.

Within a few miles of Gand, I was wakened from a pleasant fireside in England by my companion saying "They have lost their way"; and, seeing a house near me, I jumped out to enquire, when to my great fear I saw it was deserted. I immediately suspected something, and went back for a pistol, and then thundered at the door; no one came. Looking round, I saw other houses; towards which upon my moving the postillion got off, and, telling me in French, as a consolation, that he could not understand it, went with me towards a house where there was light, and suddenly ran off. I immediately went to the carriage, and we gave sabres to the servants; when he ran back from out of sight, and knocked again at the door and roused two, who told us the way. By the by, we had crossed several times the bridge, and from the road and back again, whereas we had nothing to do but to go straight on, instead of which he crossed over and was

going back in the direction of Bruges, when our servant stopped him. I cannot explain his conduct; he was dreadfully frightened.

We arrived at Ghent at 3 in the morning, and knocked some time at the gates, but at last, by means of a few francs, got through—passports not asked for. Got to the Hôtel des Pays Bas, where Count Artois resided while at Ghent. We were ushered into a splendid room, got excellent Rhenish, butter, cheese, etc., and went to bed.

April 27.—At Gand Charles the 1st of Spain was born. It was here he really showed the insufficiency of ambition and all the joys of manhood. After having at Brussels resigned to Philip his extensive dominions, he came here, and enjoyed many days while passing over the scenes of his youth, which neither the splendour attached to a European or an Indian crown nor to the conquests of his powerful and noble views could efface. He did not seek Pavia; no, it was at Gand that he sought for his last draught of worldly joy. The town was worthy of it, if beauty and antiquity, if riches and liberty with all their train, could render it worthy of him. This town has all the beauty of Bruges, but more extensive: finer houses perhaps, fine cathedral, fine paintings, fine streets, fine canal. The streets are perhaps the finest I have seen; not so unpleasantly regular as London, not so high, but more rich in outside.

We visited the Cathedral; and, after having been accustomed to the tinselly ornaments of our Catholic chapels, and the complete want of any in the Scotch and English churches, we

were much pleased with the Cathedral's inside dress: paintings that were by the hand of masters; the fortune of a bishop expended in building the part near the altar in marble and statues not contemptible, united with the airy, high fretted roof and little light, impressive of awe. Under this Cathedral is the first Belgian church that was built in the reign of Charlemagne, 800 years, I think, after Christ. It is low-roofed, but so strong it bears the weight of the Cathedral upon it. There were several paintings preserved in it (before the date of oil-painting), where the colours are mixed with white of egg. Some curious tombs, where the different styles are evident. In the earliest tomb some of the draperies on the relief are in a bold fine style. One of the earliest has a bishop, where all his robes are carved out, with almost the threads of his vest. Others, however, are for general effect. We mounted 450 steps to the top of the steeple; whence we saw a complete horizon of plain, canals, intersecting trees, and houses and steeples thrown here and there, with Gand below at our feet. The sea at a distance, bound by the hands of man, which pointed "So far shall ye go and no farther." Bruges held in the horizon its steeples to our view, and many hamlets raised from out their surrounding wood their single spires to sight.

Treading again the iron-plated 450 stairs, we came into the street; and, mounting into a fiacre, we went to the Ecole de Dessin, where we found a well-provided gallery of paintings, with two students, unmoved by the visitors around, painting with the patience if not the genius of Dutch masters. They were rather

a nuisance on the present occasion, as one covered with his machine a *chef d'œuvre* of Rubens, the *St. Roch amongst the Sick of the Plague*. There were two more by the same, of St. Roch and his Dog, etc. They were in a different style of colouring—sombre and grey; none of his gay draperies that I, no connoisseur, thought were constituents of Rubens. I saw—I do not remember whose, but—a picture that struck me much, *The Beheading of St. Jean*, where all the interest and beauty consisted in a dog smelling the dead body. There were two of Van Eyck, the first (according to the Flemish) who invented painting in oil; where the colouring was splendid and very like the stiffness of glass, but the faces were very good. Kruger had many here in honour of Charles the Vth. Amongst the others, one rather (though probably not meant as such) satirical: Charles, landing, takes hold of Dame Africa, who quietly points to a lion at her feet. Query—to drive him away? There was a *Judgment of Solomon* by the same, where the child was painted dead with most perfect nature; so much so that my companion, who is a father, could not bear its sight. Teniers has here a *Temptation of St. Anthony*: strange caricature—what a satire! If mere deceit is the acme of perfection, some Dutchmen may snatch the palm from either Apelles or Parrhasius. They paint boards with an engraving upon them, or a door,¹ or aught else, so inimitably that it deceived my friend. We went into the

¹ The word, as written by Charlotte Polidori, seems to be "dole" rather than anything else. It looks as if she had copied the form of Dr. Polidori's word without understanding what it was. I substitute "door," but this is done *faute de mieux*.

Academy of Casts, of Design, etc. There are generally 400 pupils in this town: many fall off annually without great advancement, and are trod on the heels by others.

We thence proceeded to another (we might say) cathedral. The steeple is not yet finished: the model is exhibited, with the curses of the Flemish exhibitors upon the "grande nation" for having taken the funds for its finishing. There are more good pictures than even in the Cathedral: the columns also please me more, being round, with a Gothic approach to Corinthian capital. The most beautiful painting I have yet seen is here (though I probably shall not be held out in my opinion by connoisseurs)—by Pollent, representing the trial of the true Cross upon a sick lady. The harmony of colouring, the soberness (without the commonly accompanying dulness) of the colouring, the good design and grouping, are, in my opinion, beautiful. Not even the splendid colouring of Rubens can make his pictures, in my eyes, equal to it.

[I do not know who is the painter termed Pollent by Polidori: on p. 50 there is the name Polenck, which may designate the same painter. Neither of these names can be traced by me in a catalogue of pictures in the Museum of Antwerp.]

There is one standing by it, of Vandyck, which has some sublimity in it, perhaps arising from indistinctness. It represents the effect of Christ's last sigh. By this altar stood twelve small pictures, hung out at this time for people to tread the "way of Calvary," representing the different stages of our

Saviour's sufferings. There were many more pictures, but I cannot remember; seeing so many crowded in the Gallery put others out of my head. But there were painted in the Cathedral of St. Bavon, on the marble in the style of reliefs, different subjects of Scripture in a most masterly style; and so well were the shades managed that we could hardly believe the cicerone when he assured us they were paintings.

In the Gallery of Casts there were the statues of two English ladies of London by an artist who resided thirty years there, and upon his return bestowed these as his finest works. The faces, though not perfect or Grecian, I must say for my countrywomen, pleased me almost as much as any *Venus de' Medici*.

I have found the people polite, so far as showing the way and then not waiting for a reward—taking off their hats as if *you* had done them the favour.

April 28.—We set off at 8 this morning to go to Anvers; but, after having proceeded some way, one of the wheels refused to turn, and, after at the next village hammering a long while, I rode off in a passing calèche to Ghent, where I put a maréchal with his assistant into a voiture, and, mounting myself on horseback, returned to the coach. My horse was particularly fond of the shade; and, a house being near one of the barriers, he kindly stopped there to cool me. I, after waiting some time, began to press him to go forward, when he kicked etc. We went, while the carriage was being repaired, into a cottage, where all was extremely neat, and we saw two pictures in it that certainly would

not shame the collection of many of our *soi-disant* cognoscenti. The old man was sick of a fever; and, upon giving him medicine, his kind half sympathetically fell ill of a toothache. Never did I see such chips of the old block as his two daughters. They were very kind. It being Sunday, we saw all the women of the village—all ugly: indeed, I have not seen a pretty woman since I left Ostend.

[This reference to April 28 as being a Sunday puts a stop to any preceding question as to the right day of the month, for in fact April 28, 1816, *was* a Sunday.]

On proceeding on our journey, we were stopped for our passports, and the fellow began bullying us, thinking we were French; but, when he heard we were English, he became cap in hand, and let us go: indeed, we have not yet shown our passports.

Having eaten, I issued forth in search of the Promenade, and found the canal with walks called La Copeure. Many ladies, all ugly without exception—the only pretty woman being fat and sixty. It very much resembled the Green Basin, where our West-end cits trot on one another's heels with all possible care: not quite so crowded. Coming back, I tourized to the Roi d'Espagne, where, as in a coffeehouse, I found a room full of disreputable women and card-tables. This, instead of the streets, is the lounge for such women. I went to the Café Grand, where by means of mirrors some excellent effects are produced. There also were billiards, cards, dice, etc. A cup of coffee, some centimes; a glass of lemonade, two sous: a woman presides at the end of the room.

"Lord Byron" was in the *Ghent Gazette*. Lord Byron encouraged me to write *Cajetan*, and to continue being a tragedian. Murray offered £150 for two plays, and £500 for my tour.

April 29.—Looking from my window, I saw a native dashing about in a barouche and four. There is in the town a society of nobles, and another of literati. Mr. Scamp has a fine collection of pictures, which I did not see. In Ghent, as well as in all other places where I have been, the barber's sign is Mambrino's helm. On the Sunday mornings there is a market for flowers in pot in the Place des Armes.

We set off at 11 in the morning, and passed through some fine villages: one of which, St. Nicholas, the mistress of the inn told me Buonaparte made into a town—"mais il n'y a pas des postes." The country is tiresomely beautiful. Fine avenues, which make us yawn with admiration; not a single variation; no rising ground—yes, one spot raised for a windmill. The landscape is as unchangeable as the Flemish face. The houses white-washed, with a row of trees before them; the roofs tiled, and the windows large. Indeed, the appearance of comfort in the places we have passed through is much greater than any I have seen in England. We have only seen one country-villa, and that very English: its pasture had the only firs we have yet seen. The avenues are sometimes terminated by a church or a house—the church very ugly; and both very tiresome, as they always prove much farther off than is at first expected. The ground cultivated, and without

a weed—no waste ground. The plough moves as if cutting water, the soil is so light a sand. Women work in the fields as well as men. No more difference is found in the face of the inhabitants than in the face of the country. Nothing striking, all evenness, no genius, much stupidity. They seemed to spend all their fund of cleanliness upon their fields and houses, for they carry none about them.

An oldish man wears a three-cornered cocked hat, capacious breeches, black or blue stockings, buckles, and a great-coat; young, fancy travelling-caps. The women wear enormous gold earrings, large wooden shoes. Their dress is a kind of bedgown, like the Scotch. Young girls of eight in town have their hair dressed with a net or cap. In towns and villages the better peasant-women wear a black silk mantle with a hood, that looks well. Multitudes of children everywhere, who tumble and run by the side of the carriage to gain a few centimes. In the larger villages the market-places are splendidly large, with a little square place in the middle, with pollards and a statue. The houses seem comfortable everywhere. Going into the house of a postmaster, we saw some English prints. At another, our servants having got down and comfortably seated themselves to a bottle of wine etc., the postmistress, on our getting out, took *us* for the servants, and told us "the messieurs Anglais were in yon room"—and then made us a thousand apologies. At every posthorse place there is kept a book of the posts: many barriers—every 1-1/2 mile.

At Gand they had told us we could not reach Anvers without passing the Scheldt at 2 o'clock—we passed it at 6-1/2.

The town of Antwerp makes a good figure at a distance, chiefly on account of its Cathedral, which has a very airy appearance, the steeple showing the sky between its meeting arches. About five steeples. The fortifications, which enabled Carnot to make such a defence, produce no great effect on the sight.

[The defence by Carnot was, when Polidori wrote, a quite recent event, 1814.]

The Scheldt is a fine river, not so large as our Thames, and covered with ugly Dutch vessels. We passed our coach in a boat.

[This coach was a formidable affair. According to Mr. Pryse Lockhart Gordon, it was "copied from the celebrated one of Napoleon taken at Genappe, with additions. Besides a *lit de repos*, it contained a library, a plate-chest, and every apparatus for dining."]

On landing, twenty porters ran off with our things to a cart. As they were passing, one in all the pomp of office stopped us, and asked for our passports, which (on handing to him) he detained, giving his directions to the police.

The older parts of Antwerp have a novel and strange effect by the gable-ends being all to the street, ornamented—very acute angles. The Place de Meer is fine. The old street, the finest I ever saw, has some fine houses. Many of the houses have English labels on them. In our sitting-room are two beds. Indeed, the

towns are beautiful: their long streets, their houses all clean-stuccoed or white-washed, with strange old-fashioned fronts, the frequent canals, the large places and venerable cathedrals. Their places are much finer than our squares, for they contain trees, and are open without railing.

Went to the café, and saw all playing at dominoes. Read *The Times* till the 23rd. Fine furniture, everywhere of cherry-tree.

At Gand in the Cathedral the cicerone laid great stress on the choir-seats being all made of solid acajou. The master of the inn at Ghent assures me the carriage of Buonaparte was made in Paris—the body-carriage at Brussels: no English work. Plenty of Americans in the town.

April 30.—Got up late, and went to look at the carriage, and found that the back had been not of the best-made. Called a maréchal, who assured me it could not be better. Breakfasted. Then looked at an old calèche, for which asked 60 naps. Refused it.

Got, with a guide, a calèche to see the lions. The town is large: apparently, not a proportionable quantity of misery. Women better-looking. At all the fountains, Madonnas—and upon all the corners of the streets, with lamps before them. Lamps with reverberators strung on ropes into the middle of the streets. Went to the Cathedral. Everywhere we have been, dreadful complaints of French vandalism. In this chapel it has been shameless: once crowded with altars of marble, now there are about five—only two marble, the others painted in imitation.

Pictures were stolen—altars sold by auction—only one saved, bought by a barber for a louis. The others, with all the tombs, monuments, everything, broken by these encouragers of the fine arts. So great was the ruin that there were five feet of fragments over the church—even the columns that support the roof were so much defaced that they were obliged, in restoring it, to pare them all much thinner. Some pictures were carried to Paris, of which some are now about to be replaced. It was the feast of St. Anthony, and many candles were burning about, and some relics were fixed above the doors. In many parts of the chapel were frames containing silver representations, very small, of bad limbs etc., offered by the devout. Many images over altars, dressed out in silk and taffeta: most common one, the Virgin Mary. Though the French acted with all the spirit of Vandals and true Gauls, yet to their very mischief is owing the greatest beauty of the Cathedral, the choir not being divided from the church, so that from one end to the other there is a complete perspective and one of the finest effects I have seen, the airiness and length being now proportionate. There is one great defect in the internal decorations—that they are Greek. What bad taste it is to ornament Gothic with Corinthian columns must be evident: to make it also more glaring, the marble is all coloured. There is here a fine marble altar-railing. Indeed, in all the churches we have here seen they are beautiful—especially where boys, called in Italian "puttini," are sculptured. The confessionals are of wood, with evangelical figures, nearly as large as life, between

each box—not badly carved.

We went to see another church, wherein is the tomb of Rubens.

[This is the Church of St. Jâques.]

It is in a chapel by itself, where annually a mass is said for his soul. It is worthy of him: ornamented by a painting, by himself, of St. George, and a statue he brought with him from Rome of the Holy Virgin. The church in which he is buried was saved from pillage by the priests belonging to it revolutionizing. It is crowded with altars and pictures—some Rubens, some Polenck, and others. There is a painting by Metsys, who originally was a maréchal, and who with his mere hammer formed the decorations to a pump, which are not bad. The Latin inscription on his monumental stone refers to a story related of him: that, upon courting the daughter of Francis Floris, the artist with indignation talked about the dirty rascal's impudence, he being merely a blacksmith; on which Metsys set off for Rome, and upon his return asked the daughter to introduce him to her father's room of painting: where, finding a picture not finished, he painted a bee—that excited the indignation of Floris's pocket-handkerchief, and gained him his daughter. I have seen the picture, and it might be true. The pump is not bad, being merely beaten into shape. On the top is a giant who used to cut off merchants' gains by means of tolls, and their hands by means of axes. He used to throw an iron band into the scales of his tradesmen; and from thence, 'tis said, Antwerp got its name.

[This may be "said": but a less legendary derivation of the Flemish name Antwerpen is "aent werf," or "on the wharf."]

The sides of this church all along are lined with confessionals.

In the Church des Augustins we saw Rubens's *Assembly of the Saints*, from Paris; where he has shown how weak he could be in composition, and in vanity—for it is the third picture in which he has put himself in St. George's armour. The composition is confused, without an object to fix the attention. A Vandyck near him is much superior.

[Polidori's observations about Flemish paintings are generally indicative of liking, more or less: but Byron went dead against them. In a letter of his to his half-sister, Mrs. Leigh, written from Brussels on May 1, 1816, we find: "As for churches and pictures, I have stared at them till my brains are like a guide-book: the last (though it is heresy to say so) don't please me at all. I think Rubens a very great dauber, and prefer Vandyck a hundred times over—but then I know nothing about the matter. Rubens's women have all red gowns and red shoulders; to say nothing of necks, of which they are more liberal than charming. It may all be very fine, and I suppose it may be art, for 'tis not nature." Again, in a letter to John Murray from Milan, October 15, 1816: "The Flemish school, such as I saw it in Flanders, I utterly detested, despised, and abhorred."]

Here is also the famous picture of Jordaens, of *The Martyrdom of St. Apollonia*. Colouring approaches Rubens; but abominable composition—crowded, large, numerous figures in a small space.

There were some modern paintings of existing artists—meagre statue-compositions.

In the Musée we saw many Rubenses. The famous *Descent from the Cross*: the effect of the white sheet is wonderfully beautiful. Picture's drawing I do not like. The Christ seems not dead, as there is certainly action; but the colouring is splendidly rich. The *Crucifixion* near it, inferior in all. In a sketch near it he has not succeeded so well in the white sheet, it being not so splendidly white. We could only see the side-pieces of the great *Crucifixion*, as the large piece was being framed. In these there is much caricature drawing: a woman rising from the dead—surely a woman large as Guy Warwick giant's wife, if ever he had one: caricature physiognomies, and most hellish egregious breasts, which a child refuses, with horror in its face. His horses have much spirit—true Flemish size. Indeed, divest Rubens of his rich apparel, and he is a mere dauber in design. There is a *Mary going to Elizabeth*, looking more like a cardinal: indeed, my companion, Lord Byron, took her for one of the red-vested nobles. No divinity about his Christs; putrefaction upon his Gods; exaggerated passion about his men and women, painted not all-concealing. In his picture of *The Adoration of the Magi*, query did he not intend to play upon the people by passing off a caricature for a religious painting? The royal personage in green seems as if his eyes had grown big after dinner. He has no costume properly applied: the Virgin in the manger is dressed meretriciously in silks and lace. Then look at our blessed Saviour

showing His wounds. His finest painting is his *Crucifixion* in which is the white sheet: but there are defects. What then must be the power of colouring which causes you to view his paintings with pleasure! It is like melodious music which makes you forget the absurd words of an old English song.

Vandyck, in my opinion, was much superior to Rubens. His colouring, near his, is sombre; but then his design is more perfect, his impressions remain longer in the mind distinct, and do not fade away into ideas of red and blue round white. A little *Crucifix* of his is worth his rival's largest paintings. His *Christ Dead* is beautiful, wherein are contained the Blessed Virgin, St. Mary Magdalene, and St. John weeping: the different expressions of grief, the unison of colouring with the subject, the composition, all excellent.

From the Cathedral we went to see the works of Napoleon. We first saw the Basins. They are not so large as our West India Docks—square—but are capable of holding ships of the line; there are two. Between them is what was formerly the Hanseatic Hall, now magazines. When the English were last here they threw bombs, but this was of no avail; dung was put upon the ships, and men were at hand in case of fire. From the Basins we went along the quays—very long, along the labouring Scheldt; then into the places for marine arsenals, where the vessels were on the stocks—the finest works I ever saw, now useless through our jealousy. The rope-house, quite finished, is enormously long, and is to be pulled down. The timbers for

the ship were numbered, and carried to Amsterdam. The citadel was mean-looking, though so strong. The chief batteries are as old as Alva's time—there was one pointed out as erected by Colonel Crawford. Before Napoleon's time there was little done towards the formation of these basins and others; but, said our guide, "he decreed they should be made, and they appeared." They are all surrounded with high walls to hinder the escape of the employed. Carnot has commanded here twice. He was rather disliked, yet they had rather have him than any other. They all agree in his genius. In the time of the Walcheren business the English were expected with open arms: only three hundred soldiers—Bernadotte was general. The siege was not very strict on the last occasion, and no mischief was done on either side. In the Basins there have been twenty-six line. In the dread of a siege all the suburbs were destroyed and all the trees around. The suburbs rose immediately, the trees in years. In the citadel there are 1500 forçats. Sometimes the number exceeds 2000.

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