

VARIOUS

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Содержание

LORD BYRON	4
LETTERS AND JOURNALS OF LORD BYRON, WITH NOTICES OF HIS LIFE, BY THOMAS MOORE, Vol. ii	4
HIS SENSIBILITY	6
TO AUGUSTA	8
AMOUR AT VENICE	16
AT VENICE	20
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

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LORD BYRON

**LETTERS AND JOURNALS OF LORD
BYRON, WITH NOTICES OF HIS
LIFE, BY THOMAS MOORE, Vol. ii**

[To attempt anything like an analysis of a "great big book," of 823 pages, like the present, and that within a sheet of 16 pages, would be an effort of condensation indeed. Besides, the very nature of the volume before us will not admit of such a task being performed with much regard to accuracy or unique character. The "Letters," of which, the work is, in great part, composed, are especially ill adapted for such a purpose; since, many of them become interesting

only from manner rather than importance of matter. Horace Walpole's Correspondence would make but a dull book cut in "little stars" in the letter style; and Lord Byron, as a letter writer, resembles Walpole more closely than any other writer of his time. His gay, anecdotal style is delightful—his epithets and single words are always well chosen, and often convey more than one side of the letter of a commonplace mind.

Our sheet of Extracts is from such portions of Mr. Moore's volume as appear to illustrate the main points of the Noble Poet's character and habits, as the superscriptions will best explain—*currente calamo* from pages 22 to 769—within a few leaves of the Appendix.]

HIS SENSIBILITY

With the following melancholy passage one of his journals concludes:—

"In the weather for this tour (of thirteen days) I have been very fortunate—fortunate in a companion (Mr. H.)—fortunate in all our prospects, and exempt from even the little petty accidents and delays which often render journeys in a less wild country disappointing. I was disposed to be pleased. I am a lover of nature, and an admirer of beauty; I can bear fatigue and welcome privation, and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. But in all this—the recollection of bitterness, and more especially of recent and more home desolation, which must accompany me through life, have preyed upon me here; and neither the music of the shepherd, the crashing of the avalanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the glacier, the forest, nor the cloud, have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart, nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty, and the power, and the glory, around, above, and beneath me—."

On his return from an excursion to Diodati, an occasion was afforded for the gratification of his jesting propensities by the avowal of the young physician (Polidori) that—he had fallen in love. On the evening of this tender confession they both appeared at Shelley's cottage—Lord Byron, in the highest and most boyish spirits, rubbing his hands as he walked about the room, and in

that utter incapacity of retention which was one of his foibles, making jesting allusions to the secret he had just heard. The brow of the doctor darkened as this pleasantry went on, and, at last, he angrily accused Lord Byron of hardness of heart. "I never," said he, "met with a person so unfeeling." This sally, though the poet had evidently brought it upon himself, annoyed him most deeply. "Call *me* cold-hearted—*me* insensible!" he exclaimed, with manifest emotion—"as well might you say that glass is not brittle, which has been cast down a precipice, and lies dashed to pieces at the foot!"

TO AUGUSTA

I

My sister! my sweet sister! if a name
Dearer and purer were, it should be thine,
Mountains and seas divide us, but I claim
No tears, but tenderness to answer mine.
Go where I will, to me thou art the same—
A loved regret which I would not resign.
There yet are two things in my destiny—
A world to roam through, and a home with thee.

II

The first were nothing—had I still the last,
It were the haven of my happiness;
But other claims and other ties thou hast,
And mine is not the wish to make them less.
A strange doom is thy father's son's, and part
Recalling, as it lies beyond redress;
Reversed for him our grandsire's fate of yore—

He had no rest at sea, nor I on shore.

III

If my inheritance of storms hath been
In other elements, and on the rocks
Of perils overlook'd or unforeseen,
I have sustain'd my share of worldly shocks,
The fault was mine; nor do I seek to screen
My errors with defensive paradox;
I have been cunning in mine overthrow,
The careful pilot of my proper woe.

IV

Mine were my faults, and mine be their reward.
My whole life was a contest, since the day
That gave me being, gave me that which marr'd
The gift—a fate, or will, that walk'd astray;
And I at times have found the struggle hard,
And thought of shaking off my bonds of clay:
But now I fain would for a time survive,
If but to see what next can well arrive.

V

Kingdoms and empires in my little day
I have outlived, and yet I am not old;
And when I look on this, the petty spray
Of my own years of trouble, which have roll'd
Like a wild bay of breakers, melts away:
Something—I know not what—does still uphold
A spirit of slight patience—not in vain,
Even for its own sake, do we purchase pain.

VI

Perhaps the workings of defiance stir
Within me—or perhaps a cold despair,
Brought on when ills habitually recur—
Perhaps a kinder clime, or purer air,
(For even to this may change of soul refer,
And with light armour we may learn to bear,)
Have taught me a strange quiet, which was not
The chief companion of a calmer lot.

VII

I feel almost at times as I have felt
In happy childhood; trees, and flowers, and brooks,
Which do remember me of where I dwelt
Ere my young mind was sacrificed to books,
Come as of yore upon me, and can melt
My heart with recognition of their looks:
And even at moments I could think I see
Some living thing to love—but none like thee.

VIII

Here are the Alpine landscapes which create
A fund for contemplation.—to admire
Is a brief feeling of a trivial date;
But something worthier do such scenes inspire:
Here to be lonely is not desolate.
For much I view which I could most desire,
And, above all, a lake I can behold
Lovelier, not dearer, than our own of old.

IX

Oh that thou wert but with me!—but I grow
The fool of my own wishes, and forget
The solitude which I have vaunted so
Has lost its praise in this but one regret;
There may be others which I less may show;—
I am not of the plaintive mood, and yet
I feel an ebb in my philosophy
And the tide rising in my alter'd eye.

X

I did remind thee of our own dear lake,
By the old hall which may be mine no more,
Leman's is fair; but think not I forsake
The sweet remembrance of a dearer shore:
Sad havoc Time must with my memory make
Ere *that* or *thou* can fade these eyes before;
Though, like all things which I have loved, they are
Resign'd for ever, or divided far.

XI

The world is all before me; I but ask
Of nature that with which she will comply—
It is but in her summer sun to bask,
To mingle with the quiet of her sky,
To see her gentle fare without a mask,
And never gaze on it with apathy.
She was my early friend, and now shall be
My sister—till I look again on thee.

XII

I can reduce all feelings but this one:
And that I would not;—for at length I see
Such scenes as those wherein my life begun.
The earliest—even the only paths for me—
Had I but sooner learnt the crowd to shun,
I had been better than I now can be:
The passions which have torn me would have slept:
I had not suffered, and *thou* hadst not wept.

XIII

With false ambition what had I to do?
Little with love, and least of all with fame;
And yet they came unsought, and with me grew,
And made me all which they can make—a name.
Yet this was not the end I did pursue;
Surely I once beheld a nobler aim.
But all is over—I am one the more
To baffled millions which have gone before.

XIV

And for the future, this world's future may
From me demand but little of my care;
I have outlived myself by many a day;
Having survived so many things that were;
My years have been no slumber, but the prey
Of ceaseless vigils; for I had the share
Of life that might have filled a century,
Before its fourth in time had passed me by.

XV

And for the remnant which may be to come
I am content; and for the past I feel
Not thankless—for within the crowded sum
Of struggles, happiness at times would steal,
And for the present I would not benumb
My feelings farther.—Nor shall I conceal,
That with all this I still can look around,
And worship Nature with a thought profound.

XVI

For thee my own sweet sister, in thy heart
I know myself secure, as thou in mine;
We were and are—I am even as thou art—
Beings who ne'er each other can resign;
It is the same, together or apart,
From life's commencement to its slow decline
We are entwined—let death come slow or fast,
The tie which bound the first endures the last!

AMOUR AT VENICE

Venice, November 17, 1816.

"I wrote to you from Verona the other day in my progress hither, which letter I hope you will receive. Some three years ago, or it may be more, I recollect you telling me that you had received a letter from our friend, Sam, dated "On board his gondola." *My* gondola is, at this present, waiting for me on the canal; but I prefer writing to you in the house, it being autumn—and rather an English autumn than otherwise. It is my intention to remain at Venice during the winter, probably, as it has always been (next to the east) the greenest island of my imagination. It has not disappointed me; though its evident decay would, perhaps, have that effect upon others. But I have been familiar with ruins too long to dislike desolation. Besides, I have fallen in love, which, next to falling into the canal (which would be of no use, as I can swim,) is the best or the worst thing I could do. I have got some extremely good apartments in the house of a "Merchant of Venice," who is a good deal occupied with business, and has a wife in her twenty-second year. Marianna (that is her name) is in her, appearance altogether like an antelope. She has the large, black, oriental eyes, with that peculiar expression in them, which is seen rarely among *Europeans*—even the Italians—and which many of the Turkish women give themselves by tinging the eyelid

—an art not known out of that country, I believe. This expression she has *naturally*—and something more than this. In short, I cannot describe the effect of this kind of eye—at least upon me. Her features are regular, and rather aquiline—mouth small—skin clear and soft, with a kind of hectic colour—forehead remarkably good; her hair is of the dark gloss, curl, and colour of Lady J-'s; her figure is light and pretty, and she is a famous songstress—scientifically so; her natural voice (in conversation, I mean,) is very sweet; and the *naiveté* of the Venetian dialect is always pleasing in the mouth of a woman.

November 23.

You will perceive that my description, which was proceeding with the minuteness of a passport, has been interrupted for several days. In the meantime.

December 5.

Since my former dates, I do not know that I have much to add on the subject, and, luckily, nothing to take away; for I am more pleased than ever with my Venetian, and begin to feel very serious on that point—so much so, that I shall be silent.

By way of divertisement, I am studying daily, at an Armenian monastery, the Armenian language. I found that my mind wanted something craggy to break upon; and this—as the most difficult thing I could discover here for an amusement—I have chosen, to torture me into attention. It is a rich language, however, and would amply repay any one the trouble of learning it. I try,

and shall go on;—but I answer for nothing, least of all for my intentions or my success. There are some very curious MSS. in the monastery, as well as books; translations also from Greek originals, now lost, and from Persian and Syriac, &c.; besides works of their own people. Four years ago the French instituted an Armenian professorship. Twenty pupils presented themselves on Monday morning, full of noble ardour, ingenuous youth, and impregnable industry. They persevered with a courage worthy of the nation and of universal conquest, till Thursday; when *fifteen* of the *twenty* succumbed to the six and twentieth letter of the alphabet. It is, to be sure, a Waterloo of an Alphabet—that must be said for them. But it is so like these fellows, to do by it as they did by their sovereigns—abandon both; to parody the old rhymes, "Take a thing and give a thing"—"Take a king and give a king. They are the worst of animals, except their conquerors.

I hear that that H-n is your neighbour, having a living in Derbyshire. You will find him an excellent hearted fellow, as well as one of the cleverest; a little, perhaps, too much japped by preferment in the church and the tuition of youth, as well as inoculated with the disease of domestic felicity, besides being overrun with fine feelings about women and *constancy* (that small change of love, which people exact so rigidly, receive in such counterfeit coin, and repay in baser metal;) but, otherwise, a very worthy man, who has lately got a pretty wife, and (I suppose) a child by this time. Pray remember me to him, and say that I know not which to envy most—his neighbourhood, him, or you.

Of Venice I shall say little. You must have seen many descriptions; and they and they are most of them like. It is a poetical place; and classical, to us, from Shakspeare and Otway. I have not yet sinned against it in verse, nor do I know that I shall do so, having been tuneless since I crossed the Alps, and feeling, as yet, no renewal of the "estro." By the way, I suppose you have seen "Glenarvon." Madame de Staël lent it me to read from Copet last autumn. It seems to me that, if the authoress had written the *truth*, and nothing but the truth—the whole truth—the romance would not only have been more *romantic*, but more entertaining. As for the likeness, the picture can't be good—I did not sit long enough. When you have leisure, let me hear from and of you, believing me ever and truly yours most affectionately.

B.

P.S. Oh! *your Poem*—is it out? I hope Longman has paid his thousands; but don't you do as H— T—'s father did, who, having, made money by a quarto tour, became a vinegar merchant; when, lo! his vinegar turned sweet (and be d—d to it) and ruined him. My last letter to you (from Verona) was inclosed to Murray—have you got it? Direct to me *here, poste restante*. There are no English here at present. There were several in Switzerland—some women; but, except Lady Dalrymple Hamilton, most of them as ugly as virtue—at least those that I saw."

AT VENICE

To Mr. Moore

"Venice, December 24th, 1816.

"I have taken a fit of writing to you, which portends postage—once from Verona—once from Venice, and again from Venice—*thrice* that is. For this you may thank yourself, for I heard that you complained of my silence—so here goes for garrulity.

"I trust that you received my other twain of letters. My 'way of life' (or 'May of life,' which is it, according to the commentators?)—my 'way of life' is fallen into great regularity. In the mornings I go over in my gondola to hobble Armenian with the friars of the convent of St. Lazarus, and to help one of them in correcting the English of an English and Armenian grammar which he is publishing. In the evenings I do one of many nothings—either at the theatres, or some of the *conversazioni*, which are like our routs, or rather worse, for the women sit in a semicircle by the lady of the mansion, and the men stand about the room. To be sure, there is one improvement upon ours—instead of lemonade with their ices, they hand about stiff *rum-punch*—*punch*, by my palate; and this they think *English*. I would not disabuse them of so agreeable an error—'no, not for Venice.'

"Last night I was at the Count Governor's, which, of course, comprises the best society, and is very much like other gregarious meetings in every country—as in ours—except that, instead of the Bishop of Winchester, you have the Patriarch of Venice; and a motley crew of Austrians, Germans, noble Venetians, foreigners, and, if you see a quiz, you may be sure he is a consul. Oh, by the way, I forgot, when I wrote from Verona, to tell you that at Milan I met with a countryman of yours—a Colonel —, a very excellent, good-natured fellow, who knows and shows all about Milan, and is, as it were, a native there. He is particularly civil to strangers, and this is his history—at least an episode of it.

"Six-and-twenty years ago, Colonel —, then an ensign, being in Italy, fell in love with the Marchesa —, and she with him. The lady must be, at least, twenty years his senior. The war broke out; he returned to England, to serve—not his country, for that's Ireland, but England, which is a different thing; and *she*, heaven knows what she did. In the year 1814, the first annunciation of the definitive treaty of peace (and tyranny) was developed to the astonished Milanese by the arrival of Colonel —, who flinging himself full length at the feet of Madame —, murmured forth, in half forgotten Irish Italian, eternal vows of indelible constancy. The lady screamed, and exclaimed 'Who are you?' The colonel cried, 'What, don't you know me? I am so and so,' &c. &c. &c.; till at length, the Marchesa, mounting from reminiscence, to reminiscence, through the lovers of the intermediate twenty-five years, arrived at last at the recollection of her *povero* sub-

lieutenant.—She then said, 'Was there ever such virtue?' (that was her very word) and, being now a widow, gave him apartments in her palace, reinstated him in all the rights of wrong, and held him up to the admiring world as a miracle of incontinent fidelity, and the unshaken Abdiel of absence.

"Methinks this is as pretty a moral tale as any of Marmontel's. Here is another. The same lady, several years ago, made an escapade with a Swede, Count Fersen (the same whom the Stockholm mob quartered and lapidated not very long since), and they arrived at an Osteria, on the road to Rome or thereabouts. It was a summer evening, and while they were at supper, they were suddenly regaled by a symphony of fiddles in an adjacent apartment, so prettily played, that, wishing to hear them more distinctly, the count rose, and going into the musical society, said—'Gentlemen, I am sure that, as a company of gallant cavaliers, you will be delighted to show your skill to a lady, who feels anxious,' &c. &c. The men of harmony were all acquiescence—every instrument was tuned and toned, and, striking up one of their most ambrosial airs, the whole band followed the count to the lady's apartment. At their head was the first fiddler, who, bowing and fiddling at the same moment, headed his troop, and advanced up the room. Death and discord!—it was the marquess himself, who was on a serenading party in the country, while his spouse had run away from town.—The rest may be imagined; but, first of all, the lady tried to persuade him that she was there on purpose to meet him, and had chosen this method for an

harmonic surprise. So much for this gossip, which amused me when I heard it, and I send it to you, in the hope it may have the like effect. Now we'll return to Venice."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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