

**ГАРРИЕТ
БИЧЕР-СТОУ**

LADY BYRON
VINDICATED

Harriet Beecher Stowe
Lady Byron Vindicated

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Содержание

PART I	5
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	5
CHAPTER II. THE ATTACK ON LADY BYRON	7
CHAPTER III. RÉSUMÉ OF THE CONSPIRACY	28
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AFTER LORD BYRON'S DEATH	31
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	45

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Lady Byron Vindicated / A history of the Byron controversy from its beginning in 1816 to the present time

PART I

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The interval since my publication of 'The True Story of Lady Byron's Life' has been one of stormy discussion and of much invective.

I have not thought it necessary to disturb my spirit and confuse my sense of right by even an attempt at reading the many abusive articles that both here and in England have followed that disclosure. Friends have undertaken the task for me, giving me from time to time the substance of anything really worthy of attention which came to view in the tumult.

It appeared to me essential that this first excitement should in a measure spend itself before there would be a possibility of speaking to any purpose. Now, when all would seem to have spoken who can speak, and, it is to be hoped, have said the utmost they can say, there seems a propriety in listening calmly, if that be possible, to what I have to say in reply.

And, first, why have I made this disclosure at all?

To this I answer briefly, Because I considered it my duty to make it.

I made it in defence of a beloved, revered friend, whose memory stood forth in the eyes of the civilised world charged with most repulsive crimes, of which I *certainly* knew her innocent.

I claim, and shall prove, that Lady Byron's reputation has been the victim of a concerted attack, begun by her husband during her lifetime, and coming to its climax over her grave. I claim, and shall prove, that it was not I who stirred up this controversy in this year 1869. I shall show *who did do it*, and who is responsible for bringing on me that hard duty of making these disclosures, which it appears to me ought to have been made by others.

I claim that these facts were given to me unguarded by any promise or seal of secrecy, expressed or implied; that they were lodged with me as one sister rests her story with another for sympathy, for counsel, for defence. *Never* did I suppose the day would come that I should be subjected to so cruel an anguish as this use of them has been to me. Never did I suppose that,—when those kind hands, that had shed nothing but blessings, were lying in the helplessness of death, when that gentle heart, so sorely tried and to the last so full of love, was lying cold in the tomb,—a countryman in England could be found to cast the foulest slanders on her grave, and not one in all England to raise an effective voice in her defence.

I admit the feebleness of my plea, in point of execution. It was written in a state of exhausted health, when no labour of the kind was safe for me,—when my hand had not strength to hold the pen, and I was forced to dictate to another.

I have been told that I have no reason to congratulate myself on it as a literary effort. O my brothers and sisters! is there then nothing in the world to think of but literary efforts? I ask any man with a heart in his bosom, if he had been obliged to tell a story so cruel, because his mother's grave gave no rest from slander,—I ask any woman who had been forced to such a disclosure to free

a dead sister's name from grossest insults, whether she would have thought of making this work of bitterness a literary success?

Are the cries of the oppressed, the gasps of the dying, the last prayers of mothers,—are *any* words wrung like drops of blood from the human heart to be judged as literary efforts?

My fellow-countrymen of America, men of the press, I have done you one act of justice,—of all your bitter articles, I have read not one. I shall never be troubled in the future time by the remembrance of any unkind word you have said of me, for at this moment I recollect not one. I had such faith in you, such pride in my countrymen, as men with whom, above all others, the cause of woman was safe and sacred, that I was at first astonished and incredulous at what I heard of the course of the American press, and was silent, not merely from the impossibility of being heard, but from grief and shame. But reflection convinces me that you were, in many cases, acting from a misunderstanding of facts and through misguided honourable feeling; and I still feel courage, therefore, to ask from you a fair hearing. Now, as I have done you this justice, will you also do me the justice to hear me seriously and candidly?

What interest have you or I, my brother and my sister, in this short life of ours, to utter anything but the truth? Is not truth between man and man and between man and woman the foundation on which all things rest? Have you not, every individual of you, who must hereafter give an account yourself alone to God, an interest to know the exact truth in this matter, and a duty to perform as respects that truth? Hear me, then, while I tell you the position in which I stood, and what was my course in relation to it.

A shameless attack on my friend's memory had appeared in the 'Blackwood' of July 1869, branding Lady Byron as the vilest of criminals, and recommending the Guiccioli book to a Christian public as interesting from the very fact that it was the avowed production of Lord Byron's mistress.

No efficient protest was made against this outrage in England, and Littell's 'Living Age' reprinted the 'Blackwood' article, and the Harpers, the largest publishing house in America, perhaps in the world, re-published the book.

Its statements—with those of the 'Blackwood,' 'Pall Mall Gazette,' and other English periodicals—were being propagated through all the young reading and writing world of America.

I was meeting them advertised in dailies, and made up into articles in magazines, and thus the generation of to-day, who had no means of judging Lady Byron but by these fables of her slanderers, were being foully deceived. The friends who knew her personally were a small select circle in England, whom death is every day reducing. They were few in number compared with the great world, and were *silent*. I saw these foul slanders crystallising into history uncontradicted by friends who knew her personally, who, firm in their own knowledge of her virtues and limited in view as aristocratic circles generally are, had no idea of the width of the world they were living in, and the exigency of the crisis. When time passed on and no voice was raised, I spoke. I gave at first a simple story, for I knew instinctively that whoever put the first steel point of truth into this dark cloud of slander must wait for the storm to spend itself. I must say the storm exceeded my expectations, and has raged loud and long. But now that there is a comparative stillness I shall proceed, first, to prove what I have just been asserting, and, second, to add to my true story such facts and incidents as I did not think proper at first to state.

CHAPTER II. THE ATTACK ON LADY BYRON

In proving what I asserted in the first chapter, I make four points:

1st. A concerted attack upon Lady Byron's reputation, begun by Lord Byron in self-defence.

2nd. That he transmitted his story to friends to be continued after his death.

3rd. That they did so continue it.

4th. That the accusations reached their climax over Lady Byron's grave in 'Blackwood' of 1869, and the Guiccioli book, and that this re-opening of the controversy was my reason for speaking.

And first I shall adduce my proofs that Lady Byron's reputation was, during the whole course of her husband's life, the subject of a concentrated, artfully planned attack, commencing at the time of the separation and continuing during his life. By various documents carefully prepared, and used publicly or secretly as suited the case, he made converts of many honest men, some of whom were writers and men of letters, who put their talents at his service during his lifetime in exciting sympathy for him, and who, by his own request, felt bound to continue their defence of him after he was dead.

In order to consider the force and significance of the documents I shall cite, we are to bring to our view just the issues Lord Byron had to meet, both at the time of the separation and for a long time after.

In Byron's 'Memoirs,' Vol. IV. Letter 350, under date December 10, 1819, nearly four years after the separation, he writes to Murray in a state of great excitement on account of an article in 'Blackwood,' in which his conduct towards his wife had been sternly and justly commented on, and which he supposed to have been written by Wilson, of the 'Noctes Ambrosianae.' He says in this letter: 'I like and admire W—n, and he should not have indulged himself in such outrageous license. . . .

When he talks of Lady Byron's business he talks of what he knows nothing about; and you may tell him *no man can desire a public investigation of that affair more than I do.*¹

He shortly after wrote and sent to Murray a pamphlet for publication, which was printed, but not generally circulated till some time afterwards. Though more than three years had elapsed since the separation, the current against him at this time was so strong in England that his friends thought it best, at first, to use this article of Lord Byron's discreetly with influential persons rather than to give it to the public.

The writer in 'Blackwood' and the indignation of the English public, of which that writer was the voice, were now particularly stirred up by the appearance of the first two cantos of 'Don Juan,' in which the indecent caricature of Lady Byron was placed in vicinity with other indecencies, the publication of which was justly considered an insult to a Christian community.

It must here be mentioned, for the honour of Old England, that at first she did her duty quite respectably in regard to 'Don Juan.' One can still read, in Murray's standard edition of the poems, how every respectable press thundered reprobations, which it would be well enough to print and circulate as tracts for our days.

Byron, it seems, had thought of returning to England, but he says, in the letter we have quoted, that he has changed his mind, and shall not go back, adding 'I have finished the Third Canto of "Don Juan," but the things I have heard and read discourage all future publication. You may try the copy question, but you'll lose it; the cry is up, and the cant is up. I should have no objection to return the price of the copyright, and have written to Mr. Kinnaird on this subject.'

One sentence quoted by Lord Byron from the 'Blackwood' article will show the modern readers what the respectable world of that day were thinking and saying of him:—

'It appears, in short, as if this miserable man, having exhausted every species of sensual gratification—having drained the cup of sin even to its bitterest dregs—

¹ The italics are mine.

were resolved to show us that he is no longer a human being even in his frailties, but a cool, unconcerned fiend, laughing with detestable glee over the whole of the better and worse elements of which human life is composed.'

The defence which Lord Byron makes, in his reply to that paper, is of a man cornered and fighting for his life. He speaks thus of the state of feeling at the time of his separation from his wife:—

'I was accused of every monstrous vice by public rumour and private rancour; my name, which had been a knightly or a noble one since my fathers helped to conquer the kingdom for William the Norman, was tainted. I felt that, if what was whispered and muttered and murmured was true, I was unfit for England; if false, England was unfit for me. I withdrew; but this was not enough. In other countries—in Switzerland, in the shadow of the Alps, and by the blue depth of the lakes—I was pursued and breathed upon by the same blight. I crossed the mountains, but it was the same; so I went a little farther, and settled myself by the waves of the Adriatic, like the stag at bay, who betakes him to the waters.

'If I may judge by the statements of the few friends who gathered round me, the outcry of the period to which I allude was beyond all precedent, all parallel, even in those cases where political motives have sharpened slander and doubled enmity.

I was advised not to go to the theatres lest I should be hissed, nor to my duty in parliament lest I should be insulted by the way; even on the day of my departure my most intimate friend told me afterwards that he was under the apprehension of violence from the people who might be assembled at the door of the carriage.'

Now Lord Byron's charge against his wife was that SHE was directly responsible for getting up and keeping up this persecution, which drove him from England,—that she did it in a deceitful, treacherous manner, which left him no chance of defending himself.

He charged against her that, taking advantage of a time when his affairs were in confusion, and an execution in the house, she left him suddenly, with treacherous professions of kindness, which were repeated by letters on the road, and that soon after her arrival at her home her parents sent him word that she would never return to him, and she confirmed the message; that when he asked the reason why, she refused to state any; and that when this step gave rise to a host of slanders against him she silently encouraged and confirmed the slanders. His claim was that he was denied from that time forth even the justice of any tangible accusation against himself which he might meet and refute.

He observes, in the same article from which we have quoted:—

'When one tells me that I cannot "in any way justify my own behaviour in that affair," I acquiesce, because no man can "justify" himself until he knows of what he is accused; and I have never had—and, God knows, my whole desire has ever been to obtain it—any specific charge, in a tangible shape, submitted to me by the adversary, nor by others, unless the atrocities of public rumour and the mysterious silence of the lady's legal advisers may be deemed such.'

Lord Byron, his publishers, friends, and biographers, thus agree in representing his wife as the secret author and abettor of that persecution, which it is claimed broke up his life, and was the source of all his subsequent crimes and excesses.

Lord Byron wrote a poem in September 1816, in Switzerland, just after the separation, in which he stated, in so many words, these accusations against his wife. Shortly after the poet's death Murray published this poem, together with the 'Fare thee well,' and the lines to his sister, under the title of 'Domestic Pieces,' in his standard edition of Byron's poetry. It is to be remarked, then, that this was for some time a private document, shown to confidential friends, and made use of judiciously, as readers or listeners to his story were able to bear it. Lady Byron then had a strong party in England.

Sir Samuel Romilly and Dr. Lushington were her counsel. Lady Byron's parents were living, and the appearance in the public prints of such a piece as this would have brought down an aggravated storm of public indignation.

For the general public such documents as the 'Fare thee well' were circulating in England, and he frankly confessed his wife's virtues and his own sins to Madame de Staël and others in Switzerland, declaring himself in the wrong, sensible of his errors, and longing to cast himself at the feet of that serene perfection,

'Which wanted one sweet weakness—to forgive.'

But a little later he drew for his private partisans this bitter poetical indictment against her, which, as we have said, was used discreetly during his life, and published after his death.

Before we proceed to lay that poem before the reader we will refresh his memory with some particulars of the tragedy of *Æschylus*, which Lord Byron selected as the exact parallel and proper illustration of his wife's treatment of himself. In his letters and journals he often alludes to her as Clytemnestra, and the allusion has run the round of a thousand American papers lately, and been read by a thousand good honest people, who had no very clear idea who Clytemnestra was, and what she did which was like the proceedings of Lady Byron. According to the tragedy, Clytemnestra secretly hates her husband Agamemnon, whom she professes to love, and wishes to put him out of the way that she may marry her lover, *Ægistheus*. When her husband returns from the Trojan war she receives him with pretended kindness, and officiously offers to serve him at the bath. Inducing him to put on a garment, of which she had adroitly sewed up the sleeves and neck so as to hamper the use of his arms, she gives the signal to a concealed band of assassins, who rush upon him and stab him.

Clytemnestra is represented by *Æschylus* as grimly triumphing in her success, which leaves her free to marry an adulterous paramour.

'I did it, too, in such a cunning wise,
That he could neither 'scape nor ward off doom.
I staked around his steps an endless net,
As for the fishes.'

In the piece entitled 'Lines on hearing Lady Byron is ill,' Lord Byron charges on his wife a similar treachery and cruelty. The whole poem is in Murray's English edition, Vol. IV. p. 207. Of it we quote the following. The reader will bear in mind that it is addressed to Lady Byron on a sick-bed:—

'I am too well avenged, but 't was my right;
Whate'er my sins might be, thou wert not sent
To be the Nemesis that should requite,
Nor did Heaven choose so near an instrument.
Mercy is for the merciful! If thou
Hast been of such, 't will be accorded now.
Thy nights are banished from the realms of sleep,
For thou art pillowed on a curse too deep;
Yes! they may flatter thee, but thou shalt feel
A hollow agony that will not heal.
Thou hast sown in my sorrow, and must reap
The bitter harvest in a woe as real.
I have had many foes, but none like thee;

For 'gainst the rest myself I could defend,
And be avenged, or turn them into friend;
But thou, in safe implacability,
Hast naught to dread,—in thy own weakness shielded,
And in my love, which hath but too much yielded,
And spared, for thy sake, some I should not spare.
And thus upon the world, trust in thy truth,
And the wild fame of my ungoverned youth,—
On things that were not and on things that are,—
Even upon such a basis thou halt built
A monument whose cement hath been guilt!
The moral Clytemnestra of thy lord,
And hewed down with an unsuspected sword
Fame, peace, and hope, and all that better life
Which, but for this cold treason of thy heart,
Might yet have risen from the grave of strife
And found a nobler duty than to part.
But of thy virtues thou didst make a vice,
Trafficking in them with a purpose cold,
And buying others' woes at any price,
For present anger and for future gold;
And thus, once entered into crooked ways,
The early truth, that was thy proper praise,
Did not still walk beside thee, but at times,
And with a breast unknowing its own crimes,
Deceits, averments incompatible,
Equivocations, and the thoughts that dwell
In Janus spirits, the significant eye
That learns to lie with silence,² the pretext
Of prudence with advantages annexed,
The acquiescence in all things that tend,
No matter how, to the desired end,—
All found a place in thy philosophy.
The means were worthy and the end is won.
I would not do to thee as thou hast done.'

Now, if this language means anything, it means, in plain terms, that, whereas, in her early days, Lady Byron was peculiarly characterised by truthfulness, she has in her recent dealings with him acted the part of a liar,—that she is not only a liar, but that she lies for cruel means and malignant purposes,—that she is a moral assassin, and her treatment of her husband has been like that of the most detestable murderess and adulteress of ancient history, that she has learned to lie skilfully and artfully, that she equivocates, says incompatible things, and crosses her own tracks,—that she is double-faced, and has the art to lie even by silence, and that she has become wholly unscrupulous, and acquiesces in *anything*, no matter what, that tends to the desired end, and that end the destruction of her husband.

This is a brief summary of the story that Byron made it his life's business to spread through society, to propagate and make converts to during his life, and which has been in substance reasserted by 'Blackwood' in a recent article this year.

² The italics are mine.

Now, the reader will please to notice that this poem is dated in September 1816, and that on the 29th of March of that same year, he had thought proper to tell quite another story. At that time the deed of separation was not signed, and negotiations between Lady Byron, acting by legal counsel, and himself were still pending. At that time, therefore, he was standing in a community who knew all he had said in former days of his wife's character, who were in an aroused and excited state by the fact that so lovely and good and patient a woman had actually been forced for some unexplained cause to leave him. His policy at that time was to make large general confessions of sin, and to praise and compliment her, with a view of enlisting sympathy. Everybody feels for a handsome sinner, weeping on his knees, asking pardon for his offences against his wife in the public newspapers.

The celebrated 'Fare thee well,' as we are told, was written on the 17th of March, and accidentally found its way into the newspapers at this time 'through the imprudence of a friend whom he allowed to take a copy.' These 'imprudent friends' have all along been such a marvellous convenience to Lord Byron.

But the question met him on all sides, What is the matter? This wife you have declared the brightest, sweetest, most amiable of beings, and against whose behaviour as a wife you actually never had nor can have a complaint to make,—why is she *now* all of a sudden so inflexibly set against you?

This question required an answer, and he answered by writing another poem, which also *accidentally* found its way into the public prints. It is in his 'Domestic Pieces,' which the reader may refer to at the end of this volume, and is called 'A Sketch.'

There was a most excellent, respectable, well-behaved Englishwoman, a Mrs. Clermont,³ who had been Lady Byron's governess in her youth, and was still, in mature life, revered as her confidential friend. It appears that this person had been with Lady Byron during a part of her married life, especially the bitter hours of her lonely child-bed, when a young wife so much needs a sympathetic friend. This Mrs. Clermont was the person selected by Lord Byron at this time to be the scapegoat to bear away the difficulties of the case into the wilderness.

We are informed in Moore's Life what a noble pride of rank Lord Byron possessed, and how when the headmaster of a school, against whom he had a pique, invited him to dinner, he declined, saying, 'To tell you the truth, Doctor, if you should come to Newstead, I shouldn't think of inviting *you* to dine with *me*, and so I don't care to dine with you here.' Different countries, it appears, have different standards as to good taste; Moore gives this as an amusing instance of a young lord's spirit.

Accordingly, his first attack against this 'lady,' as we Americans should call her, consists in gross statements concerning her having been born poor and in an inferior rank. He begins by stating that she was

'Born in the garret, in the kitchen bred,
Promoted thence to deck her mistress' head;
Next—for some gracious service unexpressed
And from its wages only to be guessed—
Raised from the toilet to the table, where
Her wondering betters wait behind her chair.
With eye unmoved and forehead unabashed,
She dines from off the plate she lately washed:
Quick with the tale, and ready with the lie,
The genial confidante and general spy,—
Who could, ye gods! her next employment guess,—
An only infant's earliest governess!

³ In Lady Blessington's 'Memoirs' this name is given Charlemont; in the late 'Temple Bar' article on the character of Lady Byron it is given Clermont. I have followed the latter.

What had she made the pupil of her art
None knows; but that high soul secured the heart,
And panted for the truth it could not hear
With longing soul and undeluded ear!⁴

The poet here recognises as a singular trait in Lady Byron her peculiar love of truth,—a trait which must have struck everyone that had any knowledge of her through life. He goes on now to give what he certainly knew to be the real character of Lady Byron:—

‘Foiled was perversion by that youthful mind,
Which flattery fooled not, baseness could not blind,
Deceit infect not, nor contagion soil,
Indulgence weaken, or example spoil,
Nor mastered science tempt her to look down
On humbler talent with a pitying frown,
Nor genius swell, nor beauty render vain,
Nor envy ruffle to retaliate pain.’

We are now informed that Mrs. Clermont, whom he afterwards says in his letters was a spy of Lady Byron’s mother, set herself to make mischief between them. He says:—

‘If early habits,—those strong links that bind
At times the loftiest to the meanest mind,
Have given her power too deeply to instil
The angry essence of her deadly will;
If like a snake she steal within your walls,
Till the black slime betray her as she crawls;
If like a viper to the heart she wind,
And leaves the venom there she did not find,—
What marvel that this hag of hatred works
Eternal evil latent as she lurks.’

The noble lord then proceeds to abuse this woman of inferior rank in the language of the upper circles. He thus describes her person and manner:—

‘Skilled by a touch to deepen scandal’s tints
With all the kind mendacity of hints,
While mingling truth with falsehood, sneers with smiles,
A thread of candour with a web of wiles;
A plain blunt show of briefly-spoken seeming,
To hide her bloodless heart’s soul-harden’d scheming;
A lip of lies; a face formed to conceal,
And without feeling mock at all who feel;
With a vile mask the Gorgon would disown,—
A cheek of parchment and an eye of stone.
Mark how the channels of her yellow blood
Ooze to her skin and stagnate there to mud,

⁴ The italics are mine.

Cased like the centipede in saffron mail,
Or darker greenness of the scorpion's scale,—
(For drawn from reptiles only may we trace
Congenial colours in that soul or face,)
Look on her features! and behold her mind
As in a mirror of itself defined:
Look on the picture! deem it not o'ercharged
There is no trait which might not be enlarged.'

The poem thus ends:—

'May the strong curse of crushed affections light
Back on thy bosom with reflected blight,
And make thee in thy leprosy of mind
As loathsome to thyself as to mankind!
Till all thy self-thoughts curdle into hate,
Black—as thy will for others would create;
Till thy hard heart be calcined into dust,
And thy soul welter in its hideous crust.
O, may thy grave be sleepless as the bed,
The widowed couch of fire, that thou hast spread
Then when thou fain wouldst weary Heaven with prayer,
Look on thy earthly victims—and despair!
Down to the dust! and as thou rott'st away,
Even worms shall perish on thy poisonous clay.
But for the love I bore and still must bear
To her thy malice from all ties would tear,
Thy name,—thy human name,—to every eye
The climax of all scorn, should hang on high,
Exalted o'er thy less abhorred compeers,
And festering in the infamy of years.'

March 16, 1816.

Now, on the 29th of March 1816, this was Lord Byron's story. He states that his wife had a truthfulness even from early girlhood that the most artful and unscrupulous governess could not pollute,—that she always *panted* for truth,—that flattery could not fool nor baseness blind her,—that though she was a genius and master of science, she was yet gentle and tolerant, and one whom no envy could ruffle to retaliate pain.

In September of the same year she is a monster of unscrupulous deceit and vindictive cruelty.

Now, what had happened in the five months between the dates of these poems to produce such a change of opinion? Simply this:—

1st. The negotiation between him and his wife's lawyers had ended in his signing a deed of separation in preference to standing a suit for divorce.

2nd. Madame de Staël, moved by his tears of anguish and professions of repentance, had offered to negotiate with Lady Byron on his behalf, and had failed.

The failure of this application is the only apology given by Moore and Murray for this poem, which gentle Thomas Moore admits was not in quite as generous a strain as the 'Fare thee well.'

But Lord Byron knew perfectly well, when he suffered that application to be made, that Lady Byron had been entirely convinced that her marriage relations with him could never be renewed, and

that duty both to man and God required her to separate from him. The allowing the negotiation was, therefore, an artifice to place his wife before the public in the attitude of a hard-hearted, inflexible woman; her refusal was what he knew beforehand must inevitably be the result, and merely gave him capital in the sympathy of his friends, by which they should be brought to tolerate and accept the bitter accusations of this poem.

We have recently heard it asserted that this last-named piece of poetry was the sudden offspring of a fit of ill-temper, and was never intended to be published at all. There were certainly excellent reasons why his friends should have advised him not to publish it *at that time*. But that it was read with sympathy by the circle of his intimate friends, and believed by them, is evident from the frequency with which allusions to it occur in his confidential letters to them.⁵

About three months after, under date March 10, 1817, he writes to Moore: 'I suppose now I shall never be able to shake off my sables in public imagination, more particularly since my moral – clove down my fame.' Again to Murray in 1819, three years after, he says: 'I never hear anything of Ada, the little Electra of Mycenae.'

Electra was the daughter of Clytemnestra, in the Greek poem, who lived to condemn her wicked mother, and to call on her brother to avenge the father. There was in this mention of Electra more than meets the ear. Many passages in Lord Byron's poetry show that he intended to make this daughter a future partisan against her mother, and explain the awful words he is stated in Lady Anne Barnard's diary to have used when first he looked on his little girl,—'What an instrument of torture I have gained in you!'

In a letter to Lord Blessington, April 6, 1823, he says, speaking of Dr. Parr:—⁶

'He did me the honour once to be a patron of mine, though a great friend of the other branch of the house of Atreus, and the Greek teacher, I believe, of my moral Clytemnestra. I say moral because it is true, and is so useful to the virtuous, that it enables them to do anything without the aid of an Ægistheus.'

If Lord Byron wrote this poem merely in a momentary fit of spleen, why were there so many persons evidently quite familiar with his allusions to it? and why was it preserved in Murray's hands? and why published after his death? That Byron was in the habit of reposing documents in the hands of Murray, to be used as occasion offered, is evident from a part of a note written by him to Murray respecting some verses so intrusted: 'Pray let not these *versiculi* go forth with my name except *to the initiated*.'⁷

Murray, in publishing this attack on his wife after Lord Byron's death, showed that he believed in it, and, so believing, deemed Lady Byron a woman whose widowed state deserved neither sympathy nor delicacy of treatment. At a time when every sentiment in the heart of the most deeply wronged woman would forbid her appearing to justify herself from such cruel slander of a dead husband, an honest, kind-hearted, worthy Englishman actually thought it right and proper to give these lines to her eyes and the eyes of all the reading world. Nothing can show more plainly what this poem was written for, and how thoroughly it did its work! Considering Byron as a wronged man, Murray thought he was contributing his mite towards doing him justice. His editor prefaced the whole set of 'Domestic Pieces' with the following statements:—

'They all refer to the unhappy separation, of which the precise causes are still a mystery, and which he declared to the last were never disclosed to himself.

He admitted that pecuniary embarrassments, disordered health, and dislike to

⁵ In Lady Blessington's conversations with Lord Byron, just before he went to Greece, she records that he gave her this poem in manuscript. It was published in her 'Journal.'

⁶ Vol. vi. p.22.

⁷ 'Byron's Miscellany,' vol. ii. p.358. London, 1853.

family restraints had aggravated his naturally violent temper, and driven him to excesses. He suspected that his mother-in-law had fomented the discord,—which Lady Byron denies,—and that more was due to the malignant offices of a female dependant, who is the subject of the bitterly satirical sketch.

* * * *

‘To these general statements can only be added the still vaguer allegations of Lady Byron, that she conceived his conduct to be the result of insanity,—that, the physician pronouncing him responsible for his actions, she could submit to them no longer, and that Dr. Lushington, her legal adviser, agreed that a reconciliation was neither proper nor possible. No weight can be attached to the opinions of an opposing counsel upon accusations made by one party behind the back of the other, who urgently demanded and was pertinaciously refused the least opportunity of denial or defence. He rejected the proposal for an amicable separation, but consented when threatened with a suit in Doctors’ Commons.’⁸

Neither John Murray nor any of Byron’s partisans seem to have pondered the admission in these last words.

Here, as appears, was a woman, driven to the last despair, standing with her child in her arms, asking from English laws protection for herself and child against her husband.

She had appealed to the first counsel in England, and was acting under their direction.

Two of the greatest lawyers in England have pronounced that there has been such a cause of offence on his part that a return to him is neither proper nor possible, and that no alternative remains to her but separation or divorce.

He asks her to state her charges against him. She, making answer under advice of her counsel, says, ‘That if he *insists* on the specifications, he must receive them in open court in a suit for divorce.’

What, now, ought to have been the conduct of any brave, honest man, who believed that his wife was taking advantage of her reputation for virtue to turn every one against him, who saw that she had turned on her side even the lawyer he sought to retain on his;⁹ that she was an unscrupulous woman, who acquiesced in every and any thing to gain her ends, while he stood before the public, as he says, ‘accused of every monstrous vice, by public rumour or private rancour’? When she, under advice of her lawyers, made the alternative legal *separation* or open investigation in court for divorce, what did he do?

HE SIGNED THE ACT OF SEPARATION AND LEFT ENGLAND.

Now, let any man who knows the legal mind of England,—let any lawyer who knows the character of Sir Samuel Romilly and Dr. Lushington, ask whether *they* were the men to take a case into court for a woman that had no *evidence* but her own statements and impressions? Were *they* men to go to trial without proofs? Did they not know that there were artful, hysterical women in the world, and would *they*, of all people, be the men to take a woman’s story on her own side, and advise her in the last issue to bring it into open court, without legal proof of the strongest kind? Now, as long as Sir Samuel Romilly lived, this statement of Byron’s—that he was condemned unheard, and had no chance of knowing whereof he *was accused—never appeared in public*.

⁸ The italics are mine.

⁹ Lord Byron says, in his observations on an article in ‘Blackwood:’ ‘I recollect being much hurt by Romilly’s conduct: he (having a general retainer for me) went over to the adversary, alleging, on being reminded of his retainer, that he had forgotten it, as his clerk had so many. I observed that some of those who were now so eagerly laying the axe to my roof-tree might see their own shaken. His fell and crushed him.’ In the first edition of Moore’s Life of Lord Byron there was printed a letter on Sir Samuel Romilly, so brutal that it was suppressed in the subsequent editions. (See Part III.)

It, however, was most actively circulated in *private*. That Byron was in the habit of intrusting to different confidants articles of various kinds to be shown to different circles as they could bear them, we have already shown. We have recently come upon another instance of this kind. In the late eagerness to exculpate Byron, a new document has turned up, of which Mr. Murray, it appears, had never heard when, after Byron's death, he published in the preface to his 'Domestic Pieces' the sentence: '*He rejected the proposal for an amicable separation, but consented when threatened with a suit in Doctors' Commons.*' It appears that, up to 1853, neither John Murray senior, nor the son who now fills his place, had taken any notice of this newly found document, which we are now informed was drawn up by Lord Byron in August 1817, while Mr. Hobhouse was staying with him at La Mira, near Venice, given to Mr. Matthew Gregory Lewis, *for circulation among friends in England*, found in Mr. Lewis's papers after his death, and *now* in the possession of Mr. Murray.' Here it is:—

'It has been intimated to me that the persons understood to be the legal advisers of Lady Byron have declared "their lips to be sealed up" on the cause of the separation between her and myself. If their lips are sealed up, they are not sealed up by me, and the greatest favour they can confer upon me will be to open them. From the first hour in which I was apprised of the intentions of the Noel family to the last communication between Lady Byron and myself in the character of wife and husband (a period of some months), I called repeatedly and in vain for a statement of their or her charges, and it was chiefly in consequence of Lady Byron's claiming (in a letter still existing) a promise on my part to consent to a separation, if such was really her wish, that I consented at all; this claim, and the exasperating and inexpiable manner in which their object was pursued, which rendered it next to an impossibility that two persons so divided could ever be reunited, induced me reluctantly then, and repentantly still, to sign the deed, which I shall be happy—most happy—to cancel, and go before any tribunal which may discuss the business in the most public manner.

'Mr. Hobhouse made this proposition on my part, viz. to abrogate all prior intentions—and go into court—the very day before the separation was signed, and it was declined by the other party, as also the publication of the correspondence during the previous discussion. Those propositions I beg here to repeat, and to call upon her and hers to say their worst, pledging myself to meet their allegations,—whatever they may be,—and only too happy to be informed at last of their real nature.

'BYRON.'

'August 9, 1817.

'P.S.—I have been, and am now, utterly ignorant of what description her allegations, charges, or whatever name they may have assumed, are; and am as little aware for what purpose they have been kept back,—unless it was to sanction the most infamous calumnies by silence.

'BYRON.'

'La Mira, near Venice.'

It appears the circulation of this document must have been *very private*, since Moore, not *over-delicate* towards Lady Byron, did not think fit to print it; since John Murray neglected it, and since it has come out at this late hour for the first time.

If Lord Byron really desired Lady Byron and her legal counsel to understand the facts herein stated, and was willing at all hazards to bring on an open examination, why was this *privately* circulated? Why not issued as a card in the London papers? Is it likely that Mr. Matthew Gregory Lewis, and a chosen band of friends acting as a committee, requested an audience with Lady Byron, Sir Samuel Romilly, and Dr. Lushington, and formally presented this cartel of defiance?

We incline to think not. We incline to think that this small serpent, in company with many others of like kind, crawled secretly and privately around, and when it found a good chance, bit an honest Briton, whose blood was thenceforth poisoned by an undetected falsehood.

The reader now may turn to the letters that Mr. Moore has thought fit to give us of this stay at La Mira, beginning with Letter 286, dated July 1, 1817,¹⁰ where he says: 'I have been working up my impressions into a *Fourth* Canto of *Childe Harold*,' and also 'Mr. Lewis is in Venice. I am going up to stay a week with him there.'

Next, under date La Mira, Venice, July 10,¹¹ he says, 'Monk Lewis is here; how pleasant!'

Next, under date July 20, 1817, to Mr. Murray: 'I write to give you notice that I have *completed* the *fourth and ultimate canto of Childe Harold*. . . . It is yet to be copied and polished, and the notes are to come.'

Under date of La Mira, August 7, 1817, he records that the new canto is one hundred and thirty stanzas in length, and talks about the price for it. He is now ready to launch it on the world; and, as now appears, on August 9, 1817, *two days after*, he wrote the document above cited, and put it into the hands of Mr. Lewis, as we are informed, 'for circulation among friends in England.'

The reason of this may now be evident. Having prepared a suitable number of those whom he calls in his notes to Murray 'the initiated,' by private documents and statements, he is now prepared to publish his accusations against his wife, and the story of his wrongs, in a great immortal poem, which shall have a band of initiated interpreters, shall be read through the civilised world, and stand to accuse her after his death.

In the Fourth Canto of 'Childe Harold,' with all his own overwhelming power of language, he sets forth his cause as against the silent woman who all this time had been making no party, and telling no story, and whom the world would therefore conclude to be silent because she had no answer to make. I remember well the time when this poetry, so resounding in its music, so mournful, so apparently generous, filled my heart with a vague anguish of sorrow for the sufferer, and of indignation at the cold insensibility that had maddened him. Thousands have felt the power of this great poem, which stands, and must stand to all time, a monument of what sacred and solemn powers God gave to this wicked man, and how vilely he abused this power as a weapon to slay the innocent.

It is among the ruins of ancient Rome that his voice breaks forth in solemn imprecation:—

'O Time, thou beautifier of the dead,
Adorner of the ruin, comforter,
And only healer when the heart hath bled!—
Time, the corrector when our judgments err,
The test of truth, love,—sole philosopher,
For all besides are sophists,—from thy shrift
That never loses, though it doth defer!—
Time, the avenger! unto thee I lift
My hands and heart and eyes, and claim of thee a gift.

* * * *

'If thou hast ever seen me too elate,
Hear me not; but if calmly I have borne

¹⁰ Vol. iv. p.40

¹¹ Ibid. p.46.

Good, and reserved my pride against the hate
Which shall not overwhelm me, let me not have worn
This iron in my soul in vain, shall THEY not mourn?
And thou who never yet of human wrong
Left the unbalanced scale, great Nemesis,
Here where the ancients paid their worship long,
Thou who didst call the Furies from the abyss,
And round Orestes bid them howl and hiss
For that unnatural retribution,—just
Had it but come from hands less near,—in this
Thy former realm I call thee from the dust.
Dost thou not hear, my heart? awake thou shalt and must!
It is not that I may not have incurred
For my ancestral faults and mine, the wound
Wherewith I bleed withal, and had it been conferred
With a just weapon it had flowed unbound,
But now my blood shall not sink in the ground.

* * * *

‘But in this page a record will I seek;
Not in the air shall these my words disperse,
Though I be ashes,—a far hour shall wreak
The deep prophetic fulness of this verse,
And pile on human heads the mountain of my curse.
That curse shall be forgiveness. Have I not,—
Hear me, my Mother Earth! behold it, Heaven,—
Have I not had to wrestle with my lot?
Have I not suffered things to be forgiven?
Have I not had my brain seared, my heart riven,
Hopes sapped, name blighted, life’s life lied away,
And only not to desperation driven,
Because not altogether of such clay
As rots into the soul of those whom I survey?
—
‘From mighty wrongs to petty perfidy,
Have I not seen what human things could do,—
From the loud roar of foaming calumny,
To the small whispers of the paltry few,
And subtler venom of the reptile crew,
The Janus glance of whose significant eye,
Learning to lie with silence, would seem true,
And without utterance, save the shrug or sigh,
Deal round to happy fools its speechless obloquy?’¹²

¹² The italics are mine.

The reader will please notice that the lines in italics are almost, word for word, a repetition of the lines in italics in the former poem on his wife, where he speaks of a *significant eye* that has *learned to lie in silence*, and were evidently meant to apply to Lady Byron and her small circle of confidential friends.

Before this, in the Third Canto of ‘Childe Harold,’ he had claimed the sympathy of the world, as a loving father, deprived by a severe fate of the solace and society of his only child:—

‘My daughter,—with this name my song began,—
My daughter,—with this name my song shall end,—
I see thee not and hear thee not, but none
Can be so wrapped in thee; thou art the friend
To whom the shadows of far years extend.

* * * *

‘To aid thy mind’s developments, to watch
The dawn of little joys, to sit and see
Almost thy very growth, to view thee catch
Knowledge of objects,—wonders yet to thee,—
And print on thy soft cheek a parent’s kiss;—
This it should seem was not reserved for me.
Yet this was in my nature,—as it is,
I know not what there is, yet something like to this.

—

‘Yet though dull hate as duty should be taught,
I know that thou wilt love me; though my name
Should be shut out from thee as spell still fraught
With desolation and a broken claim,
Though the grave close between us,—’t were 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 will be in vain.’

To all these charges against her, sent all over the world in verses as eloquent as the English language is capable of, the wife replied nothing.

‘Assailed by slander and the tongue of strife,
Her only answer was,—a blameless life.’

She had a few friends, a very few, with whom she sought solace and sympathy. One letter from her, written at this time, preserved by accident, is the only authentic record of how the matter stood with her.

We regret to say that the publication of this document was not brought forth to clear Lady Byron’s name from her husband’s slanders, but to shield *him* from the worst accusation against him, by showing that this crime was not included in the few private confidential revelations that friendship wrung from the young wife at this period.

Lady Anne Barnard, authoress of 'Auld Robin Grey,' a friend whose age and experience made her a proper confidante, sent for the broken-hearted, perplexed wife, and offered her a woman's sympathy.

To her Lady Byron wrote many letters, under seal of confidence, and Lady Anne says: 'I will give you a few paragraphs transcribed from one of Lady Byron's own letters to me. It is sorrowful to think that in a very little time this young and amiable creature, wise, patient, and feeling, will have her character mistaken by every one who reads Byron's works. To rescue her from this I preserved her letters, and when she afterwards expressed a fear that anything of her writing should ever fall into hands to injure him (I suppose she meant by publication), I safely assured her that it never should. But here this letter shall be placed, a sacred record in her favour, unknown to herself.

'I am a very incompetent judge of the impression which the last Canto of "Childe Harold" may produce on the minds of indifferent readers.

'It contains the usual trace of a conscience restlessly awake, though his object has been too long to aggravate its burden, as if it could thus be oppressed into eternal stupor. I will hope, as you do, that it survives for his ultimate good.

'It was the acuteness of his remorse, impenitent in its character, which so long seemed to demand from my compassion to spare every semblance of reproach, every look of grief, which might have said to his conscience, "You have made me wretched."

'I am decidedly of opinion that he is responsible. He has wished to be thought partially deranged, or on the brink of it, to perplex observers and prevent them from tracing effects to their real causes through all the intricacies of his conduct. I was, as I told you, at one time the dupe of his acted insanity, and clung to the former delusions in regard to the motives that concerned me personally, till the whole system was laid bare.

'He is the absolute monarch of words, and uses them, as Bonaparte did lives, for conquest, without more regard to their intrinsic value, considering them only as ciphers, which must derive all their import from the situation in which he places them, and the ends to which he adapts them, with such consummate skill.

'Why, then, you will say, does he not employ them to give a better colour to his own character? Because he is too good an actor to over-act, or to assume a moral garb, which it would be easy to strip off.

'In regard to his poetry, egotism is the vital principle of his imagination, which it is difficult for him to kindle on any subject with which his own character and interests are not identified; but by the introduction of fictitious incidents, by change of scene or time, he has enveloped his poetical disclosures in a system impenetrable except to a very few; and his constant desire of creating a sensation makes him not averse to be the object of wonder and curiosity, even though accompanied by some dark and vague suspicions.

'Nothing has contributed more to the misunderstanding of his real character than the lonely grandeur in which he shrouds it, and his affectation of being above mankind, when he exists almost in their voice. The romance of his sentiments is another feature of this mask of state. I know no one more habitually destitute of that enthusiasm he so beautifully expresses, and to which he can work up his fancy chiefly by contagion.

'I had heard he was the best of brothers, the most generous of friends, and I thought such feelings only required to be warmed and cherished into more diffusive benevolence. Though these opinions are eradicated, and could never return but with

the decay of my memory, you will not wonder if there are still moments when the association of feelings which arose from them soften and sadden my thoughts.

‘But I have not thanked you, dearest Lady Anne, for your kindness in regard to a principal object,—that of rectifying false impressions. I trust you understand my wishes, which never were to injure Lord Byron in any way; for, though he would not suffer me to remain his wife, he cannot prevent me from continuing his friend; and it was from considering myself as such that I silenced the accusations by which my own conduct might have been more fully justified.

‘It is not necessary to speak ill of his heart in general; it is sufficient that to me it was hard and impenetrable that my own must have been broken before his could have been touched. I would rather represent this as my misfortune than as his guilt; but, surely, that misfortune is not to be made my crime! Such are my feelings; you will judge how to act.

‘His allusions to me in “Childe Harold” are cruel and cold, but with such a semblance as to make me appear so, and to attract all sympathy to himself. It is said in this poem that hatred of him will be taught as a lesson to his child. I might appeal to all who have ever heard me speak of him, and still more to my own heart, to witness that there has been no moment when I have remembered injury otherwise than affectionately and sorrowfully.

‘It is not my duty to give way to hopeless and wholly unrequited affection; but, so long as I live, my chief struggle will probably be not to remember him too kindly.

I do not seek the sympathy of the world, but I wish to be known by those whose opinion is valuable and whose kindness is dear to me. Among such, my dear Lady Anne, you will ever be remembered by your truly affectionate

‘A. BYRON.’

On this letter I observe Lord Lindsay remarks that it shows a noble but rather severe character, and a recent author has remarked that it seemed to be written rather in a ‘cold spirit of criticism.’ It seems to strike these gentlemen as singular that Lady Byron did not enjoy the poem! But there are two remarkable sentences in this letter which have escaped the critics hitherto. Lord Byron, in this, the Third Canto of ‘Childe Harold,’ expresses in most affecting words an enthusiasm of love for his sister. So long as he lived he was her faithful correspondent; he sent her his journals; and, dying, he left her and her children everything he had in the world. This certainly seems like an affectionate brother; but in what words does Lady Byron speak of this affection?

‘*I had heard he was the best of brothers*, the most generous of friends. I thought these feelings only required to be warmed and cherished into more diffusive benevolence. THESE OPINIONS ARE ERADICATED, AND COULD NEVER RETURN BUT WITH THE DECAY OF MEMORY.’ Let me ask those who give this letter as a proof that at this time no idea such as I have stated was in Lady Byron’s mind, to account for these words. Let them please answer these questions: Why had Lady Byron ceased to think him a good brother? Why does she use so strong a word as that the opinion was eradicated, torn up by the roots, and could never grow again in her except by decay of memory?

And yet this is a document Lord Lindsay vouches for as authentic, and which he brings forward in defence of Lord Byron.

Again she says, ‘Though he *would not suffer me to remain his wife*, he cannot prevent me from continuing his friend.’ Do these words not say that in some past time, in some decided manner, Lord Byron had declared to her his rejection of her as a wife? I shall yet have occasion to explain these words.

Again she says, ‘I silenced accusations by which my conduct might have been more fully justified.’

The people in England who are so very busy in searching out evidence against my true story have searched out and given to the world an important confirmation of this assertion of Lady Byron's.

It seems that the confidential waiting-maid who went with Lady Byron on her wedding journey has been sought out and interrogated, and, as appears by description, is a venerable, respectable old person, quite in possession of all her senses in general, and of that sixth sense of propriety in particular, which appears not to be a common virtue in our days.

As her testimony is important, we insert it just here, with a description of her person in full. The ardent investigators thus speak:—

‘Having gained admission, we were shown into a small but neatly furnished and scrupulously clean apartment, where sat the object of our visit. Mrs. Mimms is a venerable-looking old lady, of short stature, slight and active appearance, with a singularly bright and intelligent countenance. Although midway between eighty and ninety years of age, she is in full possession of her faculties, discourses freely and cheerfully, hears apparently as well as ever she did, and her sight is so good that, aided by a pair of spectacles, she reads the Chronicle every day with ease.

Some idea of her competency to contribute valuable evidence to the subject which now so much engages public attention on three continents may be found from her own narrative of her personal relations with Lady Byron. Mrs. Mimms was born in the neighbourhood of Seaham, and knew Lady Byron from childhood. During the long period of ten years she was Miss Milbanke's lady's-maid, and in that capacity became the close confidante of her mistress. There were circumstances which rendered their relationship peculiarly intimate. Miss Milbanke had no sister or female friend to whom she was bound by the ties of more than a common affection; and her mother, whatever other excellent qualities she may have possessed, was too high-spirited and too hasty in temper to attract the sympathies of the young.

Some months before Miss Milbanke was married to Lord Byron, Mrs. Mimms had quitted her service on the occasion of her own marriage with Mr. Mimms; but she continued to reside in the neighbourhood of Seaham, and remained on the most friendly terms with her former mistress. As the courtship proceeded, Miss Milbanke concealed nothing from her faithful attendant; and when the wedding-day was fixed, she begged Mrs. Mimms to return and fulfil the duties of lady's-maid, at least during the honeymoon. Mrs. Mimms at the time was nursing her first child, and it was no small sacrifice to quit her own home at such a moment, but she could not refuse her old mistress's request. Accordingly, she returned to Seaham Hall some days before the wedding, was present at the ceremony, and then preceded Lord and Lady Byron to Halnaby Hall, near Croft, in the North Riding of Yorkshire, one of Sir Ralph Milbanke's seats, where the newly married couple were to spend the honeymoon.

Mrs. Mimms remained with Lord and Lady Byron during the three weeks they spent at Halnaby Hall, and then accompanied them to Seaham, where they spent the next six weeks. It was during the latter period that she finally quitted Lady Byron's service; but she remained in the most friendly communication with her ladyship till the death of the latter, and for some time was living in the neighbourhood of Lady Byron's residence in Leicestershire, where she had frequent opportunities of seeing her former mistress. It may be added that Lady Byron was not unmindful of the faithful services of her friend and attendant in the instructions to her executors contained in her will. Such was the position of Mrs. Mimms towards Lady Byron; and we think no one will question that it was of a nature to entitle all that Mrs.

Mimms may say on the subject of the relations of Lord and Lady Byron to the most respectful consideration and credit.’

Such is the chronicler’s account of the faithful creature whom nothing but intense indignation and disgust at Mrs. Beecher Stowe would lead to speak on her mistress’s affairs; but Mrs. Beecher Stowe feels none the less sincere respect for her, and is none the less obliged to her for having spoken.

Much of Mrs. Mimms’s testimony will be referred to in another place; we only extract one passage, to show that while Lord Byron spent his time in setting afloat slanders against his wife, she spent hers in sealing the mouths of witnesses against him.

Of the period of the honeymoon Mrs. Mimms says:—

‘The happiness of Lady Byron, however, was of brief duration; even during the short three weeks they spent at Halmaby, the irregularities of Lord Byron occasioned her the greatest distress, and she even contemplated returning to her father. Mrs. Mimms was her constant companion and confidante through this painful period, and she does not believe that her ladyship concealed a thought from her. With laudable reticence, the old lady absolutely refuses to disclose the particulars of Lord Byron’s misconduct at this time; she gave Lady Byron a solemn promise not to do so.

* * * *

‘So serious did Mrs. Mimms consider the conduct of Lord Byron, that she recommended her mistress to confide all the circumstances to her father, Sir Ralph Milbanke, a calm, kind, and most excellent parent, and take his advice as to her future course. At one time Mrs. Mimms thinks Lady Byron had resolved to follow her counsel and impart her wrongs to Sir Ralph; but on arriving at Seaham Hall her ladyship strictly enjoined Mrs. Mimms to preserve absolute silence on the subject—a course which she followed herself;—so that when, six weeks later, she and Lord Byron left Seaham for London, not a word had escaped her to disturb her parents’ tranquillity as to their daughter’s domestic happiness. As might be expected, Mrs. Mimms bears the warmest testimony to the noble and lovable qualities of her departed mistress. She also declares that Lady Byron was by no means of a cold temperament, but that the affectionate impulses of her nature were checked by the unkind treatment she experienced from her husband.’

We have already shown that Lord Byron had been, ever since his separation, engaged in a systematic attempt to reverse the judgment of the world against himself, by making converts of all his friends to a most odious view of his wife’s character, and inspiring them with the zeal of propagandists to spread these views through society. We have seen how he prepared partisans to interpret the Fourth Canto of ‘Childe Harold.’

This plan of solemn and heroic accusation was the first public attack on his wife. Next we see him commencing a scurrilous attempt to turn her to ridicule in the First Canto of ‘Don Juan.’

It is to our point now to show how carefully and cautiously this Don Juan campaign was planned. Vol. IV. p.138, we find Letter 325 to Mr. Murray:—

‘Venice: January 25, 1819.

‘You will do me the favour to print privately, for private distribution, fifty copies of “Don Juan.” The list of the men to whom I wish it presented I will send hereafter.’

The poem, as will be remembered, begins with the meanest and foulest attack on his wife that ever ribald wrote, and puts it in close neighbourhood with scenes which every pure man or woman must feel to be the beastly utterances of a man who had lost all sense of decency. Such a potion was too strong to be administered even in a time when great license was allowed, and men were not over-nice. But Byron chooses fifty armour-bearers of that class of men who would find indecent ribaldry about a wife a good joke, and talk about the 'artistic merits' of things which we hope would make an honest boy blush.

At this time he acknowledges that his vices had brought him to a state of great exhaustion, attended by such debility of the stomach that nothing remained on it; and adds, 'I was obliged to reform my way of life, which was conducting me from the yellow leaf to the ground with all deliberate speed.'¹³ But as his health is a little better he employs it in making the way to death and hell elegantly easy for other young men, by breaking down the remaining scruples of a society not over-scrupulous.

Society revolted, however, and fought stoutly against the nauseous dose. His sister wrote to him that she heard such things said of it that *she* never would read it; and the outcry against it on the part of all women of his acquaintance was such that for a time he was quite overborne; and the Countess Guiccioli finally extorted a promise from him to cease writing it. Nevertheless, there came a time when England accepted 'Don Juan,'—when Wilson, in the 'Noctes Ambrosianae,' praised it as a classic, and took every opportunity to reprobate Lady Byron's conduct. When first it appeared the 'Blackwood' came out with that indignant denunciation of which we have spoken, and to which Byron replied in the extracts we have already quoted. He did something more than reply. He marked out Wilson as one of the strongest literary men of the day, and set his 'initiated' with their documents to work upon him.

One of these documents to which he requested Wilson's attention was the private autobiography, written expressly to give his own story of all the facts of the marriage and separation.

In the indignant letter he writes Murray on the 'Blackwood' article, Vol. IV., Letter 350—under date December 10, 1819—he says:—

'I sent home for Moore, and for Moore only (who has my journal also), my memoir written up to 1816, and I gave him leave to show it to whom he pleased, but not to publish on any account. You may read it, and you may let Wilson read it if he likes—not for his public opinion, but his private, for I like the man, and care very little about the magazine. And I could wish Lady Byron herself to read it, that she may have it in her power to mark any thing mistaken or misstated. As it will never appear till after my extinction, it would be but fair she should see it; that is to say, herself willing. Your "Blackwood" accuses me of treating women harshly; but I have been their martyr; my whole life has been sacrificed to them and by them.'

It was a part of Byron's policy to place Lady Byron in positions before the world where she *could* not speak, and where her silence would be set down to her as haughty, stony indifference and obstinacy. Such was the pretended negotiation through Madame de Staël, and such now this apparently fair and generous offer to let Lady Byron see and mark this manuscript.

The little Ada is now in her fifth year—a child of singular sensibility and remarkable mental powers—one of those exceptional children who are so perilous a charge for a mother.

Her husband proposes this artful snare to her,—that she shall mark what is false in a statement which is all built on a damning lie, that she cannot refute over that daughter's head,—and which would perhaps be her ruin to discuss.

¹³ Vol. iv. p.143.

Hence came an addition of two more documents, to be used ‘privately among friends,’¹⁴ and which ‘Blackwood’ uses after Lady Byron is safely out of the world to cast ignominy on her grave—the wife’s letter, that of a mother standing at bay for her daughter, knowing that she is dealing with a desperate, powerful, unscrupulous enemy.

Kirkby Mallory: March 10, 1820.

‘I received your letter of January 1, offering to my perusal a Memoir of part of your life. I decline to inspect it. I consider the publication or circulation of such a composition at any time as prejudicial to Ada’s future happiness. For my own sake, I have no reason to shrink from publication; but, notwithstanding the injuries which I have suffered, I should lament some of the consequences.

‘A. Byron.

‘To Lord Byron.’

Lord Byron, writing for the public, as is his custom, makes reply:—

Ravenna: April 3, 1820.

‘I received yesterday your answer, dated March 10. My offer was an honest one, and surely could only be construed as such even by the most malignant casuistry.

I could answer you, but it is too late, and it is not worth while. To the mysterious menace of the last sentence, whatever its import may be—and I cannot pretend to unriddle it—I could hardly be very sensible even if I understood it, as, before it can take place, I shall be where “nothing can touch him further.” . . . I advise you, however, to anticipate the period of your intention, for, be assured, no power of figures can avail beyond the present; and if it could, I would answer with the Florentine:—

“Ed io, che posto son con loro in croce
. e certo
La fiera moglie, più ch’altro, mi nuoce.”¹⁵

‘BYRON.

‘To Lady Byron.’

Two things are very evident in this correspondence: Lady Byron intimates that, if he publishes his story, some *consequences* must follow which she shall regret.

Lord Byron receives this as a threat, and says he doesn’t understand it. But directly after he says, ‘Before IT can take place, I shall be,’ etc.

The intimation is quite clear. He *does* understand what the consequences alluded to are. They are evidently that Lady Byron will speak out and tell her story. He says she cannot do this till *after he is dead*, and then he shall not care. In allusion to her accuracy as to dates and figures, he says: ‘Be assured no power of figures can avail beyond the present’ (life); and then ironically *advises* her to *anticipate the period*,—i.e. to speak out while he is alive.

In Vol. VI. Letter 518, which Lord Byron wrote to Lady Byron, but did not send, he says: ‘I burned your last note for two reasons,—firstly, because it was written in a style not very agreeable;

¹⁴ Lord Byron took especial pains to point out to Murray the importance of these two letters. Vol. V. Letter 443, he says: ‘You must also have from Mr. Moore the correspondence between me and Lady B., to whom I offered a sight of all that concerns herself in these papers. This is important. He has *her* letter and my answer.’

¹⁵ ‘And I, who with them on the cross am placed, truly My savage wife, more than aught else, doth harm me.’ *Inferno*, Canto, XVI., Longfellow’s translation.

and, secondly, because I wished to take your word without documents, which are the resources of worldly and suspicious people.'

It would appear from this that there was a last letter of Lady Byron to her husband, which he did not think proper to keep on hand, or show to the 'initiated' with his usual unreserve; that this letter contained some kind of *pledge* for which he preferred to take her word, *without documents*.

Each reader can imagine for himself what that *pledge* might have been; but from the tenor of the three letters we should infer that it was a promise of silence for his lifetime, on *certain conditions*, and that the publication of the autobiography would violate those conditions, and make it her duty to speak out.

This celebrated autobiography forms so conspicuous a figure in the whole history, that the reader must have a full idea of it, as given by Byron himself, in Vol. IV. Letter 344, to Murray:—

'I gave to Moore, who is gone to Rome, my life in MS.,—in seventy-eight folio sheets, brought down to 1816 . . . also a journal kept in 1814. Neither are for publication during my life, but when I am cold you may do what you please. In the mean time, if you like to read them you may, and show them to anybody you like. I care not. . . .'

He tells him also:—

'You will find in it a detailed account of my marriage and its consequences, as true as a party concerned can make such an account.'

Of the extent to which this autobiography was circulated we have the following testimony of Shelton Mackenzie, in notes to 'The Noctes' of June 1824.

In 'The Noctes' Odoherly says:—

'The fact is, the work had been copied for the private reading of a great lady in Florence.'

The note says:—

'The great lady in Florence, for whose private reading Byron's autobiography was copied, was the Countess of Westmoreland. . . . Lady Blessington had the autobiography in her possession for weeks, and confessed to having copied every line of it. Moore remonstrated, and she committed her copy to the flames, but did not tell him that her sister, Mrs. Home Purvis, now Viscountess of Canterbury, had also made a copy! . . . From the quantity of copy I have seen,—and others were more in the way of falling in with it than myself,—I surmise that at least half a dozen copies were made, and of these five are now in existence. Some particular parts, such as the marriage and separation, were copied separately; but I think there cannot be less than five full copies yet to be found.'

This was written *after the original autobiography was burned*.

We may see the zeal and enthusiasm of the Byron party,—copying seventy-eight folio sheets, as of old Christians copied the Gospels. How widely, fully, and thoroughly, thus, by this secret process, was society saturated with Byron's own versions of the story that related to himself and wife! Against her there was only the complaint of an absolute silence. She put forth no statements, no documents; had no party, sealed the lips of her counsel, and even of her servants; yet she could not but have known, from time to time, how thoroughly and strongly this web of mingled truth and lies was being meshed around her steps.

From the time that Byron first saw the importance of securing Wilson on his side, and wrote to have his partisans attend to him, we may date an entire revolution in the 'Blackwood.' It became Byron's warmest supporter,—is to this day the bitterest accuser of his wife.

Why was this wonderful silence? It appears by Dr. Lushington's statements, that, when Lady Byron did speak, she had a story to tell that powerfully affected both him and Romilly,—a story supported by evidence on which they were willing to have gone to public trial. Supposing, now, she had imitated Lord Byron's example, and, avoiding public trial, had put her story into private circulation; as he sent 'Don Juan' to fifty confidential friends, suppose she had sent a written statement of her story to fifty judges as intelligent as the two that had heard it; or suppose she had confronted his autobiography with her own,—what would have been the result?

The first result might have been Mrs. Leigh's utter ruin. The world may finally forgive the man of genius anything; but for a woman there is no mercy and no redemption.

This ruin Lady Byron prevented by her utter silence and great self-command. Mrs. Leigh never lost position. Lady Byron never so varied in her manner towards her as to excite the suspicions even of her confidential old servant.

To protect Mrs. Leigh effectually, it must have been necessary to continue to exclude even her own mother from the secret, as we are assured she did at first; for, had she told Lady Milbanke, it is not possible that so high-spirited a woman could have restrained herself from such outward expressions as would at least have awakened suspicion. There was no resource but this absolute silence.

Lady Blessington, in her last conversation with Lord Byron, thus describes the life Lady Byron was leading. She speaks of her as 'wearing away her youth in almost monastic seclusion, questioned by some, appreciated by few, seeking consolation alone in the discharge of her duties, and avoiding all external demonstrations of a grief that her pale cheek and solitary existence alone were vouchers for.'¹⁶

The main object of all this silence may be imagined, if we remember that if Lord Byron had not died,—had he truly and deeply repented, and become a thoroughly good man, and returned to England to pursue a course worthy of his powers, there was on record neither word nor deed from his wife to stand in his way.

HIS PLACE WAS KEPT IN SOCIETY, ready for him to return to whenever he came clothed and in his right mind. He might have had the heart and confidence of his daughter unshadowed by a suspicion. He might have won the reverence of the great and good in his own lands and all lands.

That hope, which was the strong support, the prayer of the silent wife, it did not please God to fulfil.

Lord Byron died a worn-out man at thirty-six. But the bitter seeds he had sown came up, after his death, in a harvest of thorns over his grave; and there were not wanting hands to use them as instruments of torture on the heart of his widow.

¹⁶ 'Conversations,' p.108.

CHAPTER III. RÉSUMÉ OF THE CONSPIRACY

We have traced the conspiracy of Lord Byron against his wife up to its latest device. That the reader's mind may be clear on the points of the process, we shall now briefly recapitulate the documents in the order of time.

I. March 17, 1816.—While negotiations for separation were pending,—‘*Fare thee well, and if for ever.*’

While writing these pages, we have received from England the testimony of one who has seen the original draught of that ‘*Fare thee well.*’ This original copy had evidently been subjected to the most careful and acute revision. Scarcely two lines that were not interlined, scarcely an adjective that was not exchanged for a better; showing that the noble lord was not so far overcome by grief as to have forgotten his reputation. (Found its way to the public prints through the imprudence of *a friend.*)

II. March 29, 1816.—An attack on Lady Byron's old governess for having been born poor, for being homely, and for having unduly influenced his wife against him; promising that her grave should be a fiery bed, etc.; also praising his wife's perfect and remarkable truthfulness and discernment, that made it impossible for flattery to fool, or baseness blind her; but ascribing all his woes to her being fooled and blinded by this same governess. (Found its way to the prints by the imprudence of *a friend.*)

III. September 1816.—Lines on hearing that Lady Byron is ill. Calls her a Clytemnestra, who has secretly set assassins on her lord; says she is a mean, treacherous, deceitful liar, and has entirely departed from her early truth, and become the most unscrupulous and unprincipled of women. (Never printed till after Lord Byron's death, but circulated *privately* among the ‘*initiated.*’)

IV. Aug. 9, 1817.—Gives to M. G. Lewis a paper for circulation among friends in England, stating that what he most wants is *public investigation*, which has always been denied him; and daring Lady Byron and her counsel to come out publicly. (Found in M. G. Lewis's portfolio after his death; never heard of before, except among the ‘*initiated.*’)

Having given M. G. Lewis's document time to work,—

January 1818.—Gives the Fourth Canto of ‘*Childe Harold*’¹⁷ to the public.

Jan. 25, 1819.—Sends to Murray to print for private circulation among the ‘*initiated*’ the First Canto of ‘*Don Juan.*’

Is nobly and severely rebuked for this insult to his wife by the ‘*Blackwood*,’ August 1819.

October 1819.—Gives Moore the manuscript ‘*Autobiography*,’ with leave to show it to whom he pleases, and print it after his death.

Oct. 29, 1819, Vol. IV. Letter 344.—Writes to Murray, that he may read all this ‘*Autobiography*,’ and show it to anybody he likes.

Dec. 10, 1819.—Writes to Murray on this article in ‘*Blackwood*’ against ‘*Don Juan*’ and himself, which he supposes written by Wilson; sends a complimentary message to Wilson, and asks him to read his ‘*Autobiography*’ sent by Moore. (Letter 350.)

March 15, 1820.—Writes and dedicates to I. Disraeli, Esq., a vindication of himself in reply to the ‘*Blackwood*’ on ‘*Don Juan*,’ containing an indignant defence of his own conduct in relation to his wife, and maintaining that he never yet has had an opportunity of knowing whereof he has been accused; accusing Sir S. Romilly of taking his retainer, and then going over to the adverse party, etc. (Printed for *private circulation*; to be found in the standard English edition of Murray, vol. ix. p.57.)

To this condensed account of Byron's strategy we must add the crowning stroke of policy which transmitted this warfare to his friends, to be continued after his death.

¹⁷ Murray's edition of ‘*Byron's Works*,’ vol. ii. p.189; date of dedication to Hobhouse, Jan. 2, 1818.

During the last visit Moore made him in Italy, and just before Byron presented to him his 'Autobiography,' the following scene occurred, as narrated by Moore (vol. iv. p.221):—

'The chief subject of conversation, when alone, was his marriage, and the load of obloquy which it had brought upon him. He was most anxious to know the worst that had been alleged of his conduct; and, as this was our first opportunity of speaking together on the subject, I did not hesitate to put his candour most searchingly to the proof, not only by enumerating the various charges I had heard brought against him by others, but by specifying such portions of these charges as I had been inclined to think not incredible myself.

'To all this he listened with patience, and answered with the most unhesitating frankness; laughing to scorn the tales of unmanly outrage related of him, but at the same time acknowledging that there had been in his conduct but too much to blame and regret, and stating one or two occasions during his domestic life when he had been irritated into letting the "breath of bitter words" escape him,. . . which he now evidently remembered with a degree of remorse and pain which might well have entitled them to be forgotten by others.

'It was, at the same time, manifest, that, whatever admissions he might be inclined to make respecting his own delinquencies, the inordinate measure of the punishment dealt out to him had sunk deeply into his mind, and, with the usual effect of such injustice, drove him also to be unjust himself; so much so, indeed, as to impute to the quarter to which he now traced all his ill fate a feeling of fixed hostility to himself, which would not rest, he thought, even at his grave, but continue to persecute his memory as it was now embittering his life. So strong was this impression upon him, that, during one of our few intervals of seriousness, he conjured me by our friendship, if, as he both felt and hoped, I should survive him, not to let unmerited censure settle upon his name.'

In this same account, page 218, Moore testifies that

'Lord Byron disliked his countrymen, but only because he knew that his morals were held in contempt by them. The English, themselves rigid observers of family duties, could not pardon him the neglect of his, nor his trampling on principles; therefore, neither did he like being presented to them, nor did they, especially when they had wives with them, like to cultivate his acquaintance. Still there was a strong desire in all of them to see him; and the women in particular, who did not dare to look at him but by stealth, said in an under-voice, "What a pity it is!" If, however, any of his compatriots of exalted rank and high reputation came forward to treat him with courtesy, he showed himself obviously flattered by it. It seemed that, to the wound which remained open in his ulcerated heart, such soothing attentions were as drops of healing balm, which comforted him.'

When in society, we are further informed by a lady quoted by Mr. Moore, he was in the habit of speaking of his wife with much respect and affection, as an illustrious lady, distinguished for her qualities of heart and understanding; saying that all the fault of their cruel separation lay with himself.

Mr. Moore seems at times to be somewhat puzzled by these contradictory statements of his idol, and speculates not a little on what could be Lord Byron's object in using such language in public; mentally comparing it, we suppose, with the free handling which he gave to the same subject in his private correspondence.

The innocence with which Moore gives himself up to be manipulated by Lord Byron, the *naïveté* with which he shows all the process, let us a little into the secret of the marvellous powers of charming and blinding which this great actor possessed.

Lord Byron had the beauty, the wit, the genius, the dramatic talent, which have constituted the strength of some wonderfully fascinating women.

There have been women able to lead their leashes of blinded adorers; to make them swear that black was white, or white black, at their word; to smile away their senses, or weep away their reason.

No matter what these sirens may say, no matter what they may do, though caught in a thousand transparent lies, and doing a thousand deeds which would have ruined others, still men madly rave after them in life, and tear their hair over their graves. Such an enchanter in man's shape was Lord Byron.

He led captive Moore and Murray by being beautiful, a genius, and a lord; calling them 'Dear Tom' and 'Dear Murray,' while they were only commoners. He first insulted Sir Walter Scott, and then witched his heart out of him by ingenuous confessions and poetical compliments; he took Wilson's heart by flattering messages and a beautifully-written letter; he corresponded familiarly with Hogg; and, before his death, had made fast friends, in one way or another, of the whole 'Noctes Ambrosianae' Club.

We thus have given the historical *résumé* of Lord Byron's attacks on his wife's reputation: we shall add, that they were based on philosophic principles, showing a deep knowledge of mankind.

An analysis will show that they can be philosophically classified:—

1st. Those which addressed the sympathetic nature of man, representing her as cold, methodical, severe, strict, unforgiving.

2nd. Those addressed to the faculty of association, connecting her with ludicrous and licentious images; taking from her the usual protection of womanly delicacy and sacredness.

3rd. Those addressed to the moral faculties, accusing her as artful, treacherous, untruthful, malignant.

All these various devices he held in his hand, shuffling and dealing them as a careful gamester his pack of cards according to the exigencies of the game. He played adroitly, skilfully, with blinding flatteries and seductive wiles, that made his victims willing dupes.

Nothing can more clearly show the power and perfectness of his enchantments than the masterly way in which he turned back the moral force of the whole English nation, which had risen at first in its strength against him. The victory was complete.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AFTER LORD BYRON'S DEATH

At the time of Lord Byron's death, the English public had been so skilfully manipulated by the Byron propaganda, that the sympathy of the whole world was with him. A tide of emotion was now aroused in England by his early death—dying in the cause of Greece and liberty. There arose a general wail for him, as for a lost pleiad, not only in England, but over the whole world; a great rush of enthusiasm for his memory, to which the greatest literary men of England freely gave voice. By general consent, Lady Byron seems to have been looked upon as the only cold-hearted unsympathetic person in this general mourning.

From that time the literary world of England apparently regarded Lady Byron as a woman to whom none of the decorums, nor courtesies of ordinary womanhood, nor even the consideration belonging to common humanity, were due.

'She that is a widow indeed, and desolate,' has been regarded in all Christian countries as an object made sacred by the touch of God's afflicting hand, sacred in her very helplessness; and the old Hebrew Scriptures give to the Supreme Father no dearer title than 'the widow's God.' But, on Lord Byron's death, men not devoid of tenderness, men otherwise generous and of fine feeling, acquiesced in insults to his widow with an obtuseness that seems, on review, quite incredible.

Lady Byron was not only a widow, but an orphan. She had no sister for confidante; no father and mother to whom to go in her sorrows—sorrows so much deeper and darker to her than they could be to any other human being. She had neither son nor brother to uphold and protect her. On all hands it was acknowledged that, so far, there was no fault to be found in her but her utter silence. Her life was confessed to be pure, useful, charitable; and yet, in this time of her sorrow, the writers of England issued article upon article not only devoid of delicacy, but apparently injurious and insulting towards her, with a blind unconsciousness which seems astonishing.

One of the greatest literary powers of that time was the 'Blackwood,' the reigning monarch on that literary throne was Wilson, the lion-hearted, the brave, generous, tender poet, and, with some sad exceptions, the noble man. But Wilson had believed the story of Byron, and, by his very generosity and tenderness and pity, was betrayed into injustice.

In 'The Noctes' of November 1824 there is a conversation of the Noctes Club, in which North says, 'Byron and I knew each other pretty well; and I suppose there's no harm in adding, that we appreciated each other pretty tolerably. Did you ever see his letter to me?'

The footnote to this says, '*This letter, which was PRINTED in Byron's lifetime, was not published till 1830, when it appeared in Moore's "Life of Byron."* It is one of the most vigorous prose compositions in the language. Byron had the highest opinion of Wilson's genius and noble spirit.'

In the first place, with our present ideas of propriety and good taste, we should reckon it an indecorum to make the private affairs of a pure and good woman, whose circumstances under any point of view were trying, and who evidently shunned publicity, the subject of public discussion in magazines which were read all over the world.

Lady Byron, as they all knew, had on her hands a most delicate and onerous task, in bringing up an only daughter, necessarily inheriting peculiarities of genius and great sensitiveness; and the many mortifications and embarrassments which such intermeddling with her private matters must have given, certainly should have been considered by men with any pretensions to refinement or good feeling.

But the literati of England allowed her no consideration, no rest, no privacy.

In 'The Noctes' of November 1825 there is the record of a free conversation upon Lord and Lady Byron's affairs, interlarded with exhortations to push the bottle, and remarks on whisky-toddy.

Medwin's 'Conversations with Lord Byron' is discussed, which, we are told in a note, appeared a few months after the *noble* poet's death.

There is a rather bold and free discussion of Lord Byron's character—his fondness for gin and water, on which stimulus he wrote 'Don Juan;' and James Hogg says pleasantly to Mullion, 'O Mullion! it's a pity you and Byron could na ha' been acquaint. There would ha' been brave sparring to see who could say the wildest and the dreadfulest things; for he had neither fear of man or woman, and would ha' his joke or jeer, cost what it might.' And then follows a specimen of one of his jokes with an actress, that, in indecency, certainly justifies the assertion. From the other stories which follow, and the parenthesis that occurs frequently ('Mind your glass, James, a little more!'), it seems evident that the party are progressing in their peculiar kind of *civilisation*.

It is in this same circle and paper that Lady Byron's private affairs come up for discussion. The discussion is thus elegantly introduced:—

Hogg.—'Reach me the black bottle. I say, Christopher, what, after all, is your opinion o' Lord and Leddy Byron's quarrel? Do you yoursel' take part with him, or with her? I wad like to hear your real opinion.'

North.—'Oh, dear! Well, Hogg, since you will have it, I think Douglas Kinnard and Hobhouse are bound to tell us whether there be any truth, and how much, in this story about the declaration, signed by Sir Ralph' [Milbanke].

The note here tells us that this refers to a statement that appeared in 'Blackwood' immediately after Byron's death, to the effect that, previous to the formal separation from his wife, Byron required and obtained from Sir Ralph Milbanke, Lady Byron's father, a statement to the effect that Lady Byron had no charge of moral delinquency to bring against him.¹⁸

North continues:—

'And I think Lady Byron's letter—the "Dearest Duck" one I mean—should really be forthcoming, if her ladyship's friends wish to stand fair before the public.

At present we have nothing but loose talk of society to go upon; and certainly, if the things that are said be true, there must be thorough explanation from some quarter, or the tide will continue, as it has assuredly begun, to flow in a direction very opposite to what we were for years accustomed. Sir, they must explain this business of the letter. You have, of course, heard about the invitation it contained, the warm, affectionate invitation, to Kirkby Mallory'—

Hogg interposes,—

'I dinna like to be interruptin' ye, Mr. North; but I must inquire, Is the jug to stand still while ye're going on at that rate?'

North—"There, Porker! These things are part and parcel of the chatter of every bookseller's shop; à fortiori, of every drawing-room in May Fair. Can the matter stop here? Can a great man's memory be permitted to incur damnation while these saving clauses are afloat anywhere uncontradicted?'

And from this the conversation branches off into strong, emphatic praise of Byron's conduct in Greece during the last part of his life.

The silent widow is thus delicately and considerably reminded in the 'Blackwood' that she is the talk, not only over the whisky jug of the Noctes, but in every drawing-room in London; and that she *must* speak out and explain matters, or the whole world will set against her.

But she does not speak yet. The public persecution, therefore, proceeds. Medwin's book being insufficient, another biographer is to be selected. Now, the person in the Noctes Club who was held to have the most complete information of the Byron affairs, and was, on that account, first thought

¹⁸ Recently, Lord Lindsay has published another version of this story, which makes it appear that he has conversed with a lady who conversed with Hobhouse during his lifetime, in which this story is differently reported. In the last version, it is made to appear that Hobhouse got this declaration from Lady Byron herself.

of by Murray to execute this very delicate task of writing a memoir which should include the most sacred domestic affairs of a noble lady and her orphan daughter, was *Maginn*. Maginn, the author of the pleasant joke, that ‘man never reaches the apex of civilisation till he is too drunk to pronounce the word,’ was the first person in whose hands the ‘Autobiography,’ *Memoirs*, and *Journals* of Lord Byron were placed with this view.

The following note from Shelton Mackenzie, in the June number of ‘*The Noctes*,’ 1824, says,—

‘At that time, had he been so minded, Maginn (Odoherty) could have got up a popular Life of Byron as well as most men in England. Immediately on the account of Byron’s death being received in London, John Murray proposed that Maginn should bring out *Memoirs*, *Journals*, and *Letters* of Lord Byron, and, with this intent, placed in his hand every line that he (Murray) possessed in Byron’s handwriting. . . .

The strong desire of Byron’s family and executors that the “Autobiography” should be burned, to which desire Murray foolishly yielded, made such an hiatus in the materials, that Murray and Maginn agreed it would not answer to bring out the work then. Eventually Moore executed it.’

The character of the times in which this work was to be undertaken will appear from the following note of Mackenzie’s to ‘*The Noctes*’ of August 1824, which we copy, with the *author’s own Italics*:—

‘In the “Blackwood” of July 1824 was a poetical epistle by the renowned Timothy Tickler to the editor of the “John Bull” magazine, on an article in his first number. This article. . . professed to be a portion of the veritable “Autobiography” of Byron which was burned, and was called “My Wedding Night.” It appeared to relate in detail everything that occurred in the twenty-four hours immediately succeeding that in which Byron was married. It had plenty of coarseness, and some to spare. It went into particulars such as hitherto had been given only by Faublas; and it had, notwithstanding, many phrases and some facts which evidently did not belong to a mere fabricator. Some years after, I compared this “Wedding Night” with what I had all assurance of having been transcribed from the actual manuscripts of Byron, and was persuaded that the magazine-writer must have had the actual statement before him, or have had a perusal of it. The writer in “Blackwood” declared his conviction that it really was Byron’s own writing.’

The reader must remember that Lord Byron died April 1824; so that, according to this, his ‘Autobiography’ was made the means of this gross insult to his widow three months after his death.

If some powerful cause had not paralysed all feelings of gentlemanly honour, and of womanly delicacy, and of common humanity, towards Lady Byron, throughout the whole British nation, no editor would have dared to open a periodical with such an article; or, if he had, he would have been overwhelmed with a storm of popular indignation, which, like the fire upon Sodom, would have made a pillar of salt of him for a warning to all future generations.

‘Blackwood’ reproves the ‘John Bull’ in a poetical epistle, recognising the article as coming from Byron, and says to the *author*,—

‘But that you, sir, a wit and a scholar like you,
Should not blush to produce what he blushed not to do,—
Take your compliment, youngster; this doubles, almost,
The sorrow that rose when his honour was lost.’

We may not wonder that the ‘Autobiography’ was burned, as Murray says in a recent account, by a committee of Byron’s *friends*, including Hobhouse, his sister, and Murray himself.

Now, the 'Blackwood' of July 1824 thus declares its conviction that this outrage on every sentiment of human decency came from Lord Byron, and that his honour was lost. Maginn does not undertake the memoir. No memoir at all is undertaken; till finally Moore is selected, as, like Demetrius of old, a well-skilled gilder and 'maker of silver shrines,' though *not* for Diana. To Moore is committed the task of doing his best for this battered image, in which even the worshippers recognise foul sulphurous cracks, but which they none the less stand ready to worship as a genuine article that 'fell down from Jupiter.'

Moore was a man of no particular nicety as to moralities, but in that matter seems not very much below what this record shows his average associates to be. He is so far superior to Maginn, that his vice is rose-coloured and refined. He does not burst out with such heroic stanzas as Maginn's frank invitation to Jeremy Bentham:—

'Jeremy, throw your pen aside,
And come get drunk with me;
And we'll go where Bacchus sits astride,
Perched high on barrels three.'

Moore's vice is cautious, soft, seductive, slippery, and covered at times with a thin, tremulous veil of religious sentimentalism.

In regard to Byron, he was an unscrupulous, committed partisan: he was as much bewitched by him as ever man has been by woman; and therefore to him, at last, the task of editing Byron's 'Memoirs' was given.

This Byron, whom they all knew to be obscene beyond what even their most drunken tolerance could at first endure; this man, whose foul license *spoke out* what most men conceal from mere respect to the decent instincts of humanity; whose 'honour was lost,'—was submitted to this careful manipulator, to be turned out a perfected idol for a world longing for an idol, as the Israelites longed for the calf in Horeb.

The image was to be invested with deceitful glories and shifting haloes,—admitted faults spoken of as peculiarities of sacred origin,—and the world given to understand that no common rule or measure could apply to such an undoubtedly divine production; and so the hearts of men were to be wrung with pity for his sorrows as the yearning pain of a god, and with anger at his injuries as sacrilege on the sacredness of genius, till they were ready to cast themselves at his feet, and adore.

Then he was to be set up on a pedestal, like Nebuchadnezzar's image on the plains of Dura; and what time the world heard the sound of cornet, sackbut, and dulcimer, in his enchanting verse, they were to fall down and worship.

For Lady Byron, Moore had simply the respect that a commoner has for a lady of rank, and a good deal of the feeling that seems to underlie all English literature,—that it is no matter what becomes of the woman when the man's story is to be told. But, with all his faults, Moore was not a cruel man; and we cannot conceive such outrageous cruelty and ungentlemanly indelicacy towards an unoffending woman, as he shows in these 'Memoirs,' without referring them to Lord Byron's own influence in making him an unscrupulous, committed partisan on his side.

So little pity, so little sympathy, did he suppose Lady Byron to be worthy of, that he laid before her, in the sight of all the world, selections from her husband's letters and journals, in which the privacies of her courtship and married life were jested upon with a vulgar levity; letters filled, from the time of the act of separation, with a constant succession of sarcasms, stabs, stings, epigrams, and vindictive allusions to herself, bringing her into direct and insulting comparison with his various mistresses, and implying their superiority over her. There, too, were gross attacks on her father and mother, as having been the instigators of the separation; and poor Lady Milbanke, in particular, is

sometimes mentioned with epithets so offensive, that the editor prudently covers the terms with stars, as intending language too gross to be printed.

The last mistress of Lord Byron is uniformly brought forward in terms of such respect and consideration, that one would suppose that the usual moral laws that regulate English family life had been specially repealed in his favour. Moore quotes with approval letters from Shelley, stating that Lord Byron's connection with La Guiccioli has been of inestimable benefit to him; and that he is now becoming what he should be, 'a virtuous man.' Moore goes on to speak of the connection as one, though somewhat reprehensible, yet as having all those advantages of marriage and settled domestic ties that Byron's affectionate spirit had long sighed for, but never before found; and in his last *résumé* of the poet's character, at the end of the volume, he brings the

mistress into direct comparison with the wife in a single sentence: 'The woman to whom he gave the love of his maturer years idolises his name; and, with a *single unhappy exception*, scarce an instance is to be found of one brought. . . into relations of amity with him who did not retain a kind regard for him in life, and a fondness for his memory.'

Literature has never yet seen the instance of a person, of Lady Byron's rank in life, placed before the world in a position more humiliating to womanly dignity, or wounding to womanly delicacy.

The direct implication is, that she has no feelings to be hurt, no heart to be broken, and is not worthy even of the consideration which in ordinary life is to be accorded to a widow who has received those awful tidings which generally must awaken many emotions, and call for some consideration, even in the most callous hearts.

The woman who we are told walked the room, vainly striving to control the sobs that shook her frame, while she sought to draw from the servant that last message of her husband which she was never to hear, was not thought worthy even of the rights of common humanity.

The first volume of the 'Memoir' came out in 1830. Then for the first time came one flash of lightning from the silent cloud; and she who had never spoken before spoke out. The libels on the memory of her dead parents drew from her what her own wrongs never did. During all this time, while her husband had been keeping her effigy dangling before the public as a mark for solemn curses, and filthy lampoons, and *secretly*-circulated disclosures, that spared no sacredness and violated every decorum, she had not uttered a word. She had been subjected to nameless insults, discussed in the assemblies of drunkards, and challenged to speak for herself. Like the chaste lady in 'Comus,' whom the vile wizard had bound in the enchanted seat to be 'grinned at and chattered at' by all the filthy rabble of his dehumanised rout, she had remained pure, lofty, and undefiled; and the stains of mud and mire thrown upon her had fallen from her spotless garments.

Now that she is dead, a recent writer in 'The London Quarterly' dares give voice to an insinuation which even Byron gave only a *suggestion* of when he called his wife Clytemnestra; and hints that she tried the power of youth and beauty to win to her the young solicitor Lushington, and a handsome young officer of high rank.

At this time, such insinuations had not been thought of; and the only and chief allegation against Lady Byron had been a cruel severity of virtue.

At all events, when Lady Byron spoke, the world listened with respect, and believed what she said.

Here let us, too, read her statement, and give it the careful attention she solicits (Moore's 'Life of Byron,' vol. vi. p.275):—

'I have disregarded various publications in which facts within my own knowledge have been grossly misrepresented; but I am called upon to notice some of the erroneous statements proceeding from one who claims to be considered as Lord Byron's confidential and authorised friend. Domestic details ought not to be intruded on the public attention: if, however, they are so intruded, the persons affected by them have a right to refute injurious charges. Mr. Moore has

promulgated his own impressions of private events in which I was most nearly concerned, as if he possessed a competent knowledge of the subject. Having survived Lord Byron, I feel increased reluctance to advert to any circumstances connected with the period of my marriage; nor is it now my intention to disclose them further than may be indispensably requisite for the end I have in view. Self-vindication is not the motive which actuates me to make this appeal, and the spirit of accusation is unmingled with it; but when the conduct of my parents is brought forward in a disgraceful light by the passages selected from Lord Byron's letters, and by the remarks of his biographer, I feel bound to justify their characters from imputations which I know to be false. The passages from Lord Byron's letters, to which I refer, are,—the aspersion on my mother's character (p.648, l.4):¹⁹ "My child is very well and flourishing, I hear; but I must see also. I feel no disposition to resign it to the contagion of its grandmother's society." The assertion of her dishonourable conduct in employing a spy (p.645, l.7, etc.): "A Mrs. C. (now a kind of housekeeper and spy of Lady N's), who, in her better days, was a washerwoman, is supposed to be—by the learned—very much the occult cause of our domestic discrepancies." The seeming exculpation of myself in the extract (p.646), with the words immediately following it, "Her nearest relations are a—;" where the blank clearly implies something too offensive for publication. These passages tend to throw suspicion on my parents, and give reason to ascribe the separation either to their direct agency, or to that of "officious spies" employed by them.²⁰ From the following part of the narrative (p.642), it must also be inferred that an undue influence was exercised by them for the accomplishment of this purpose: "It was in a few weeks after the latter communication between us (Lord Byron and Mr. Moore) that Lady Byron adopted the determination of parting from him. She had left London at the latter end of January, on a visit to her father's house in Leicestershire; and Lord Byron was in a short time to follow her. They had parted in the utmost kindness, she wrote him a letter, full of playfulness and affection, on the road; and, immediately on her arrival at Kirkby Mallory, her father wrote to acquaint Lord Byron that she would return to him no more."

"In my observations upon this statement, I shall, as far as possible, avoid touching on any matters relating personally to Lord Byron and myself. The facts are,—I left London for Kirkby Mallory, the residence of my father and mother, on the 15th of January, 1816. Lord Byron had signified to me in writing (Jan. 6) his absolute desire that I should leave London on the earliest day that I could conveniently fix. It was not safe for me to undertake the fatigue of a journey sooner than the 15th. Previously to my departure, it had been strongly impressed on my mind that Lord Byron was under the influence of insanity. This opinion was derived in a great measure from the communications made to me by his nearest relatives and personal attendant, who had more opportunities than myself of observing him during the latter part of my stay in town. It was even represented to me that he was in danger of destroying himself. With the concurrence of his family, I had consulted Dr. Baillie, as a friend (Jan. 8), respecting this supposed malady. On acquainting him with the state of the case, and with Lord Byron's desire that I should leave London, Dr. Baillie thought that my absence might be advisable as an experiment, assuming the fact of mental derangement; for Dr. Baillie, not having had access to

¹⁹ The references are to the first volume of the first edition of Moore's 'Life,' originally published by itself.

²⁰ 'The officious spies of his privacy,' p.650.

Lord Byron, could not pronounce a positive opinion on that point. He enjoined that, in correspondence with Lord Byron, I should avoid all but light and soothing topics.

Under these impressions I left London, determined to follow the advice given by Dr. Baillie. Whatever might have been the nature of Lord Byron's conduct towards me from the time of my marriage, yet, supposing him to be in a state of mental alienation, it was not for me, nor for any person of common humanity, to manifest at that moment a sense of injury. On the day of my departure, and again on my arrival at Kirkby (Jan. 16), I wrote to Lord Byron in a kind and cheerful tone, according to those medical directions.

'The last letter was circulated, and employed as a pretext for the charge of my having been subsequently influenced to "desert"²¹ my husband. It has been argued that I parted from Lord Byron in perfect harmony; that feelings incompatible with any deep sense of injury had dictated the letter which I addressed to him; and that my sentiments must have been changed by persuasion and interference when I was under the roof of my parents. These assertions and inferences are wholly destitute of foundation. When I arrived at Kirkby Mallory, my parents were unacquainted with the existence of any causes likely to destroy my prospects of happiness; and, when I communicated to them the opinion which had been formed concerning Lord Byron's state of mind, they were most anxious to promote his restoration by every means in their power. They assured those relations who were with him in London, that "they would devote their whole care and attention to the alleviation of his malady;" and hoped to make the best arrangements for his comfort if he could be induced to visit them.

'With these intentions, my mother wrote on the 17th to Lord Byron, inviting him to Kirkby Mallory. She had always treated him with an affectionate consideration and indulgence, which extended to every little peculiarity of his feelings. Never did an irritating word escape her lips in her whole intercourse with him. The accounts given me after I left Lord Byron, by the persons in constant intercourse with him, added to those doubts which had before transiently occurred to my mind as to the reality of the alleged disease; and the reports of his medical attendant were far from establishing the existence of anything like lunacy. Under this uncertainty, I deemed it right to communicate to my parents, that, if I were to consider Lord Byron's past conduct as that of a person of sound mind, nothing could induce me to return to him. It therefore appeared expedient, both to them and myself, to consult the ablest advisers. For that object, and also to obtain still further information respecting the appearances which seemed to indicate mental derangement, my mother determined to go to London. She was empowered by me to take legal opinions on a written statement of mine, though I had then reasons for reserving a part of the case from the knowledge even of my father and mother.

Being convinced by the result of these inquiries, and by the tenor of Lord Byron's proceedings, that the notion of insanity was an illusion, I no longer hesitated to authorise such measures as were necessary in order to secure me from being ever again placed in his power. Conformably with this resolution, my father wrote to him on the 2nd of February to propose an amicable separation. Lord Byron at first rejected this proposal; but when it was distinctly notified to him that, if he persisted in his refusal, recourse must be had to legal measures, he agreed to sign a deed of separation. Upon applying to Dr. Lushington, who was intimately acquainted

²¹ 'The deserted husband,' p.651.

with all the circumstances, to state in writing what he recollected upon this subject, I received from him the following letter, by which it will be manifest that my mother cannot have been actuated by any hostile or ungenerous motives towards Lord Byron:—

“MY DEAR LADY BYRON,—I can rely upon the accuracy of my memory for the following statement. I was originally consulted by Lady Noel, on your behalf, whilst you were in the country. The circumstances detailed by her were such as justified a separation; but they were not of that aggravated description as to render such a measure indispensable. On Lady Noel’s representation, I deemed a reconciliation with Lord Byron practicable, and felt most sincerely a wish to aid in effecting it. There was not on Lady Noel’s part any exaggeration of the facts; nor, so far as I could perceive, any determination to prevent a return to Lord Byron: certainly none was expressed when I spoke of a reconciliation. When you came to town, in about a fortnight, or perhaps more, after my first interview with Lady Noel, I was for the first time informed by you of facts utterly unknown, as I have no doubt, to Sir Ralph and Lady Noel. On receiving this additional information, my opinion was entirely changed: I considered a reconciliation impossible. I declared my opinion, and added, that, if such an idea should be entertained, I could not, either professionally or otherwise, take any part towards effecting it.

“Believe me, very faithfully yours,

“STEPH. LUSHINGTON.

“Great George Street, Jan. 31, 1830.”

‘I have only to observe, that, if the statements on which my legal advisers (the late Sir Samuel Romilly and Dr. Lushington) formed their opinions were false, the responsibility and the odium should rest with me only. I trust that the facts which I have here briefly recapitulated will absolve my father and mother from all accusations with regard to the part they took in the separation between Lord Byron and myself.

‘They neither originated, instigated, nor advised that separation; and they cannot be condemned for having afforded to their daughter the assistance and protection which she claimed. There is no other near relative to vindicate their memory from insult. I am therefore compelled to break the silence which I had hoped always to observe, and to solicit from the readers of Lord Byron’s “Life” an impartial consideration of the testimony extorted from me.

‘A. I. NOEL BYRON.

‘Hanger Hill, Feb. 19, 1830.’

The effect of this statement on the literary world may be best judged by the discussion of it by Christopher North (Wilson) in the succeeding May number of ‘The Noctes,’ where the bravest and most generous of literary men that then were—himself the husband of a gentle wife—thus gives sentence: the conversation is between North and the Shepherd:—

North.—‘God forbid I should wound the feelings of Lady Byron, of whose character, known to me but by the high estimation in which it is held by all who have enjoyed her friendship, I have always spoken with respect! . . . But may I, without harshness or indelicacy, say, here among ourselves, James, that, by marrying Byron, she took upon herself, with eyes wide open and conscience clearly convinced, duties very different from those of which, even in common cases, the presaging foresight shadows. . . the light of the first nuptial moon?’

Shepherd.—‘She did that, sir; by my troth, she did that.’

North.—‘Miss Milbanke knew that he was reckoned a rake and a roué; and although his genius wiped off, by impassioned eloquence in love-letters that were felt to be irresistible, or hid the worst stain of, that reproach, still Miss Milbanke must have believed it a perilous thing to be the wife of Lord Byron. . . . But still, by joining her life to his in marriage, she pledged her troth and her faith and her love, under probabilities of severe, disturbing, perhaps fearful trials, in the future. . . .

‘But I think Lady Byron ought not to have printed that Narrative. Death abrogates not the rights of a husband to his wife’s silence when speech is fatal. . . . to his character as a man. Has she not flung suspicion over his bones interred, that they are the bones of a—monster? . . . If Byron’s sins or crimes—for we are driven to use terrible terms—were unendurable and unforgivable as if against the Holy Ghost, ought the wheel, the rack, or the stake to have extorted that confession from his widow’s breast? . . . But there was no such pain here, James: the declaration was voluntary, and it was calm. Self-collected, and gathering up all her faculties and feelings into unshrinking strength, she denounced before all the world—and throughout all space and all time—her husband, as excommunicated by his vices from woman’s bosom.

‘Twas to vindicate the character of her parents that Lady Byron wrote,—a holy purpose and devout, nor do I doubt sincere. But filial affection and reverence, sacred as they are, may be blamelessly, nay, righteously, subordinate to conjugal duties, which die not with the dead, are extinguished not even by the sins of the dead, were they as foul as the grave’s corruption.’

Here is what John Stuart Mill calls the literature of slavery for woman, in length and breadth; and, that all women may understand the doctrine, the Shepherd now takes up his parable, and expounds the true position of the wife. We render his Scotch into English:—

‘Not a few such widows do I know, whom brutal, profligate, and savage husbands have brought to the brink of the grave,—as good, as bright, as innocent as, and far more forgiving than, Lady Byron. There they sit in their obscure, rarely-visited dwellings; for sympathy instructed by suffering knows well that the deepest and most hopeless misery is least given to complaint.’

Then follows a pathetic picture of one such widow, trembling and fainting for hunger, obliged, on her way to the well for a can of water, her only drink, to sit down on a ‘knowe’ and say a prayer.

‘Yet she’s decently, yea, tidily dressed, poor creature! in sair worn widow’s clothes, a single suit for Saturday and Sunday; her hair, untimely gray, is neatly braided under her crape cap; and sometimes, when all is still and solitary in the fields, and all labour has disappeared into the house, you may see her stealing by herself, or leading one wee orphan by the hand, with another at her breast, to the kirkyard, where the love of her youth and the husband of her prime is buried.

‘Yet,’ says the Shepherd, ‘he was a brute, a ruffian, a monster. When drunk, how he raged and cursed and swore! Often did she dread that, in his fits of inhuman passion, he would have murdered the baby at her breast; for she had seen him dash their only little boy, a child of eight years old, on the floor, till the blood gushed from his ears; and then the madman threw himself down on the body, and howled for the gallows. Limmers haunted his door, and he theirs; and it was hers to lie, not sleep, in a cold, forsaken bed, once the bed of peace, affection, and perfect happiness. Often

he struck her; and once when she was pregnant with that very orphan now smiling on her breast, reaching out his wee fingers to touch the flowers on his father's grave. . . .

'But she tries to smile among the neighbours, and speaks of her boy's likeness to its father; nor, when the conversation turns on bygone times, does she fear to let his name escape her white lips, "My Robert; the bairn's not ill-favoured, but he will never look like his father,"—and such sayings, uttered in a calm, sweet voice. Nay, I remember once how her pale countenance reddened with a sudden flush of pride, when a gossiping crone alluded to their wedding; and the widow's eye brightened through her tears to hear how the bridegroom, sitting that sabbath in his front seat beside his bonny bride, had not his equal for strength, stature, and all that is beauty in man, in all the congregation. That, I say, sir, whether right or wrong, was—forgiveness.

Here is a specimen of how even generous men had been so perverted by the enchantment of Lord Byron's genius, as to turn all the pathos and power of the strongest literature of that day against the persecuted, pure woman, and for the strong, wicked man. These 'Blackwood' writers knew, by Byron's own filthy, ghastly writings, which had gone sorely against their own moral stomachs, that he was foul to the bone. They could see, in Moore's 'Memoirs' right before them, how he had caught an innocent girl's heart by sending a love-letter, and offer of marriage, at the end of a long friendly correspondence,—a letter that had been written to *show* to his libertine set, and sent on the toss-up of a copper, because he cared nothing for it one way or the other.

They admit that, having won this poor girl, he had been savage, brutal, drunken, cruel. They had read the filthy taunts in 'Don Juan,' and the nameless abominations in the 'Autobiography.' They had admitted among themselves that his honour was lost; but still this abused, desecrated woman must *reverence* her brutal master's memory, and not speak, even to defend the grave of her own kind father and mother.

That there was *no* lover of her youth, that the marriage-vow had been a hideous, shameless cheat, is on the face of Moore's account; yet the 'Blackwood' does not see it nor feel it, and brings up against Lady Byron this touching story of a poor widow, who really had had a true lover once, —a lover maddened, imbruted, lost, through that very drunkenness in which the Noctes Club were always glorying.

It is because of such transgressors as Byron, such supporters as Moore and the Noctes Club, that there are so many helpless, cowering, broken-hearted, abject women, given over to the animal love which they share alike with the poor dog,—the dog, who, beaten, kicked, starved, and cuffed, still lies by his drunken master with great anxious eyes of love and sorrow, and with sweet, brute forgiveness nestles upon his bosom, as he lies in his filth in the snowy ditch, to keep the warmth of life in him.

Great is the mystery of this fidelity in the poor, loving brute,—most mournful and most sacred

But, oh that a noble man should have no higher ideal of the love of a high-souled, heroic woman!

Oh that men should teach women that they owe no higher duties, and are capable of no higher tenderness, than this loving, unquestioning animal fidelity! The dog is ever-loving, ever-forgiving, because God has given him no high range of moral faculties, no sense of justice, no consequent horror at impurity and vileness.

Much of the beautiful patience and forgiveness of women is made possible to them by that utter *deadness to the sense of justice* which the laws, literature, and misunderstood religion of England have sought to induce in woman as a special grace and virtue.

The lesson to woman in this pathetic piece of special pleading is, that man may sink himself below the brute, may wallow in filth like the swine, may turn his home into a hell, beat and torture his children, forsake the marriage-bed for foul rivals; yet all this does *not* dissolve the marriage-vow on her part, nor free his bounden serf from her obligation to honour his memory,—nay, to sacrifice to it the honour due to a kind father and mother, slandered in their silent graves.

Such was the sympathy, and such the advice, that the best literature of England could give to a young widow, a peeress of England, whose husband, as they verily believed and admitted, might have done *worse* than all this; whose crimes might have been ‘foul, monstrous, unforgivable as the sin against the Holy Ghost.’ If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? If the peeress as *a wife* has no rights, what is the state of the cotter’s wife?

But, in the same paper, North again blames Lady Byron for not having come out with the whole story before the world at the time she separated from her husband. He says of the time when she first consulted counsel through her mother, keeping back one item,—

‘How weak, and worse than weak, at such a juncture, on which hung her whole fate, to ask legal advice on an imperfect document! Give the delicacy of a virtuous woman its due; but at such a crisis, when the question was whether her conscience was to be free from the oath of oaths, delicacy should have died, and nature was privileged to show unashamed—if such there were—the records of uttermost pollution.’

Shepherd.—‘And what think ye, sir, that a’ this pollution could hae been, that sae electrified Dr. Lushington?’

North.—‘Bad—bad—bad, James. Nameless, it is horrible; named, it might leave Byron’s memory yet within the range of pity and forgiveness; and, where they are, their sister affections will not be far; though, like weeping seraphs, standing aloof, and veiling their wings.’

Shepherd.—‘She should indeed hae been silent—till the grave had closed on her sorrows as on his sins.’

North.—‘Even now she should speak,—or some one else for her,— . . . and a few words will suffice. Worse the condition of the dead man’s name cannot be—far, far better it might—I believe it would be—were all the truth somehow or other declared; and declared it must be, not for Byron’s sake only, but for the sake of humanity itself; and then a mitigated sentence, or eternal silence.’

We have another discussion of Lady Byron’s duties in a further number of ‘Blackwood.’

The ‘Memoir’ being out, it was proposed that there should be a complete annotation of Byron’s works gotten up, and adorned, for the further glorification of his memory, with portraits of the various women whom he had delighted to honour.

Murray applied to Lady Byron for her portrait, and was met with a cold, decided negative.

After reading all the particulars of Byron’s harem of mistresses, and Moore’s comparisons between herself and La Guiccioli, one might *imagine* reasons why a lady, with proper self-respect, should object to appearing in this manner. One would suppose there might have been gentlemen who could well appreciate the *motive* of that refusal; but it was only considered a new evidence that she was indifferent to her conjugal duties, and wanting in that *respect* which Christopher North had told her she owed a husband’s memory, though his crimes were foul as the rottenness of the grave.

Never, since Queen Vashti refused to come at the command of a drunken husband to show herself to his drunken lords, was there a clearer case of disrespect to the marital dignity on the part of a wife. It was a plain act of insubordination, rebellion against law and order; and how shocking in Lady Byron, who ought to feel herself but too much flattered to be exhibited to the public as the head wife of a man of genius!

Means were at once adopted to subdue her contumacy, of which one may read in a note to the ‘Blackwood’ (Noctes), September 1832. An artist was sent down to Ealing to take her picture by stealth as she sat in church. Two sittings were thus obtained without her knowledge. In the third one, the artist placed himself boldly before her, and sketched, so that she could not but observe him.

We shall give the rest in Mackenzie's own words, as a remarkable specimen of the obtuseness, not to say indelicacy of feeling, which seemed to pervade the literary circles of England at the time:—

‘After prayers, Wright and his friend (the artist) were visited by an ambassador from her ladyship to inquire the meaning of what she had seen. The reply was, that Mr. Murray must have her portrait, and was compelled to take what she refused to give. The result was, Wright was requested to visit her, which he did; taking with him, not the sketch, which was very good, but another, in which there was a strong touch of caricature. Rather than allow that to appear as her likeness (a very natural and womanly feeling by the way), she consented to sit for the portrait to W. J. Newton, which was engraved, and is here alluded to.’

The artless barbarism of this note is too good to be lost; but it is quite borne out by the conversation in the Noctes Club, which it illustrates.

It would appear from this conversation that these Byron beauties appeared successively in pamphlet form; and the picture of Lady Byron is thus discussed:—

Mullion.—‘I don’t know if you have seen the last brochure. It has a charming head of Lady Byron, who, it seems, sat on purpose: and that’s very agreeable to hear of; for it shows her ladyship has got over any little soreness that Moore’s “Life” occasioned, and is now willing to contribute anything in her power to the real monument of Byron’s genius.’

North.—‘I am delighted to hear of this: ’tis really very noble in the unfortunate lady. I never saw her. Is the face a striking one?’

Mullion.—‘Eminently so,—a most calm, pensive, melancholy style of native beauty,—and a most touching contrast to the maids of Athens, Annesley, and all the rest of them. I’m sure you’ll have the proof Finden has sent you framed for the Boudoir at the Lodge.’

North.—‘By all means. I mean to do that for all the Byron Beauties.’

But it may be asked, Was there not a man in all England with delicacy enough to feel for Lady Byron, and chivalry enough to speak a bold word for her? Yes: there was one. Thomas Campbell the poet, when he read Lady Byron’s statement, believed it, as did Christopher North; but it affected him differently. It appears he did not believe it a wife’s duty to burn herself on her husband’s funeral-pile, as did Christopher North; and held the singular idea, that a wife had some rights as a human being as well as a husband.

Lady Byron’s own statement appeared in pamphlet form in 1830: at least, such is the date at the foot of the document. Thomas Campbell, in ‘The New Monthly Magazine,’ shortly after, printed a spirited, gentlemanly defence of Lady Byron, and administered a pointed rebuke to Moore for the rudeness and indelicacy he had shown in selecting from Byron’s letters the coarsest against herself, her parents, and her old governess Mrs. Clermont, and by the indecent comparisons he had instituted between Lady Byron and Lord Byron’s last mistress.

It is refreshing to hear, at last, from somebody who is not altogether on his knees at the feet of the popular idol, and who has some chivalry for woman, and some idea of common humanity. He says,—

‘I found my right to speak on this painful subject on its now irrevocable publicity, brought up afresh as it has been by Mr. Moore, to be the theme of discourse to millions, and, if I err not much, the cause of misconception to innumerable minds. I claim to speak of Lady Byron in the right of a man, and of a friend to the rights of woman, and to liberty, and to natural religion. I claim a right, more especially, as one of the many friends of Lady Byron, who, one and all, feel

aggrieved by this production. It has virtually dragged her forward from the shade of retirement, where she had hid her sorrows, and compelled her to defend the heads of her friends and her parents from being crushed under the tombstone of Byron. Nay, in a general view, it has forced her to defend herself; though, with her true sense and her pure taste, she stands above all special pleading. To plenary explanation she ought not—she never shall be driven. Mr. Moore is too much a gentleman not to shudder at the thought of that; but if other Byronists, of a far different stamp, were to force the savage ordeal, it is her enemies, and not she, that would have to dread the burning ploughshares.

‘We, her friends, have no wish to prolong the discussion: but a few words we must add, even to her admirable statement; for hers is a cause not only dear to her friends, but having become, from Mr. Moore and her misfortunes, a publicly-agitated cause, it concerns morality, and the most sacred rights of the sex, that she should (and that, too, without more special explanations) be acquitted out and out, and honourably acquitted, in this business, of all share in the blame, which is one and indivisible. Mr. Moore, on further reflection, may see this; and his return to candour will surprise us less than his momentary deviation from its path.

‘For the tact of Mr. Moore’s conduct in this affair, I have not to answer; but, if indelicacy be charged upon me, I scorn the charge. Neither will I submit to be called Lord Byron’s accuser; because a word against him I wish not to say beyond what is painfully wrung from me by the necessity of owning or illustrating Lady Byron’s unblamableness, and of repelling certain misconceptions respecting her, which are now walking the fashionable world, and which have been fostered (though Heaven knows where they were born) most delicately and warily by the Christian godfathership of Mr. Moore.

‘I write not at Lady Byron’s bidding. I have never humiliated either her or myself by asking if I should write, or what I should write; that is to say, I never applied to her for information against Lord Byron, though I was justified, as one intending to criticise Mr. Moore, in inquiring into the truth of some of his statements. Neither will I suffer myself to be called her champion, if by that word be meant the advocate of her mere legal innocence; for that, I take it, nobody questions.

‘Still less is it from the sorry impulse of pity that I speak of this noble woman; for I look with wonder and even envy at the proud purity of her sense and conscience, that have carried her exquisite sensibilities in triumph through such poignant tribulations. But I am proud to be called her friend, the humble illustrator of her cause, and the advocate of those principles which make it to me more interesting than Lord Byron’s. Lady Byron (if the subject must be discussed) belongs to sentiment and morality (at least as much as Lord Byron); nor is she to be suffered, when compelled to speak, to raise her voice as in a desert, with no friendly voice to respond to her. Lady Byron could not have outlived her sufferings if she had not wound up her fortitude to the high point of trusting mainly for consolation, not to the opinion of the world, but to her own inward peace; and, having said what ought to convince the world, I verily believe that she has less care about the fashionable opinion respecting her than any of her friends can have. But we, her friends, mix with the world; and we hear offensive absurdities about her, which we have a right to put down.

‘I proceed to deal more generally with Mr. Moore’s book. You speak, Mr. Moore, against Lord Byron’s censurers in a tone of indignation which is perfectly

lawful towards calumnious traducers, but which will not terrify me, or any other man of courage who is no calumniator, from uttering his mind freely with regard to this part of your hero's conduct. I question your philosophy in assuming that all that is noble in Byron's poetry was inconsistent with the possibility of his being devoted to a pure and good woman; and I repudiate your morality for canting too complacently about "the lava of his imagination," and the unsettled fever of his passions, being any excuses for his planting the *tic douloureux* of domestic suffering in a meek woman's bosom.

'These are hard words, Mr. Moore; but you have brought them on yourself by your voluntary ignorance of facts known to me; for you might and ought to have known both sides of the question; and, if the subject was too delicate for you to consult Lady Byron's confidential friends, you ought to have had nothing to do with the subject. But you cannot have submitted your book even to Lord Byron's sister, otherwise she would have set you right about the imaginary spy, Mrs. Clermont.'

Campbell now goes on to print, at his own peril, he says, and without time to ask leave, the following note from Lady Byron in reply to an application he made to her, when he was about to review Moore's book, for an 'estimate as to the correctness of Moore's statements.'

The following is Lady Byron's reply:—

'DEAR MR. CAMPBELL,—In taking up my pen to point out for your private information²² those passages in Mr. Moore's representation of my part of the story which were open to contradiction, I find them of still greater extent than I had supposed; and to deny an assertion here and there would virtually admit the truth of the rest. If, on the contrary, I were to enter into a full exposure of the falsehood of the views taken by Mr. Moore, I must detail various matters, which, consistently with my principles and feelings, I cannot under the existing circumstances disclose.

I may, perhaps, convince you better of the difficulty of the case by an example: It is not true that pecuniary embarrassments were the cause of the disturbed state of Lord Byron's mind, or formed the chief reason for the arrangements made by him at that time. But is it reasonable for me to expect that you or any one else should believe this, unless I show you what were the causes in question? and this I cannot do.

²² 'I (Campbell) had not time to ask Lady Byron's permission to print this private letter; but it seemed to me important, and I have published it *meo periculo*.'

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