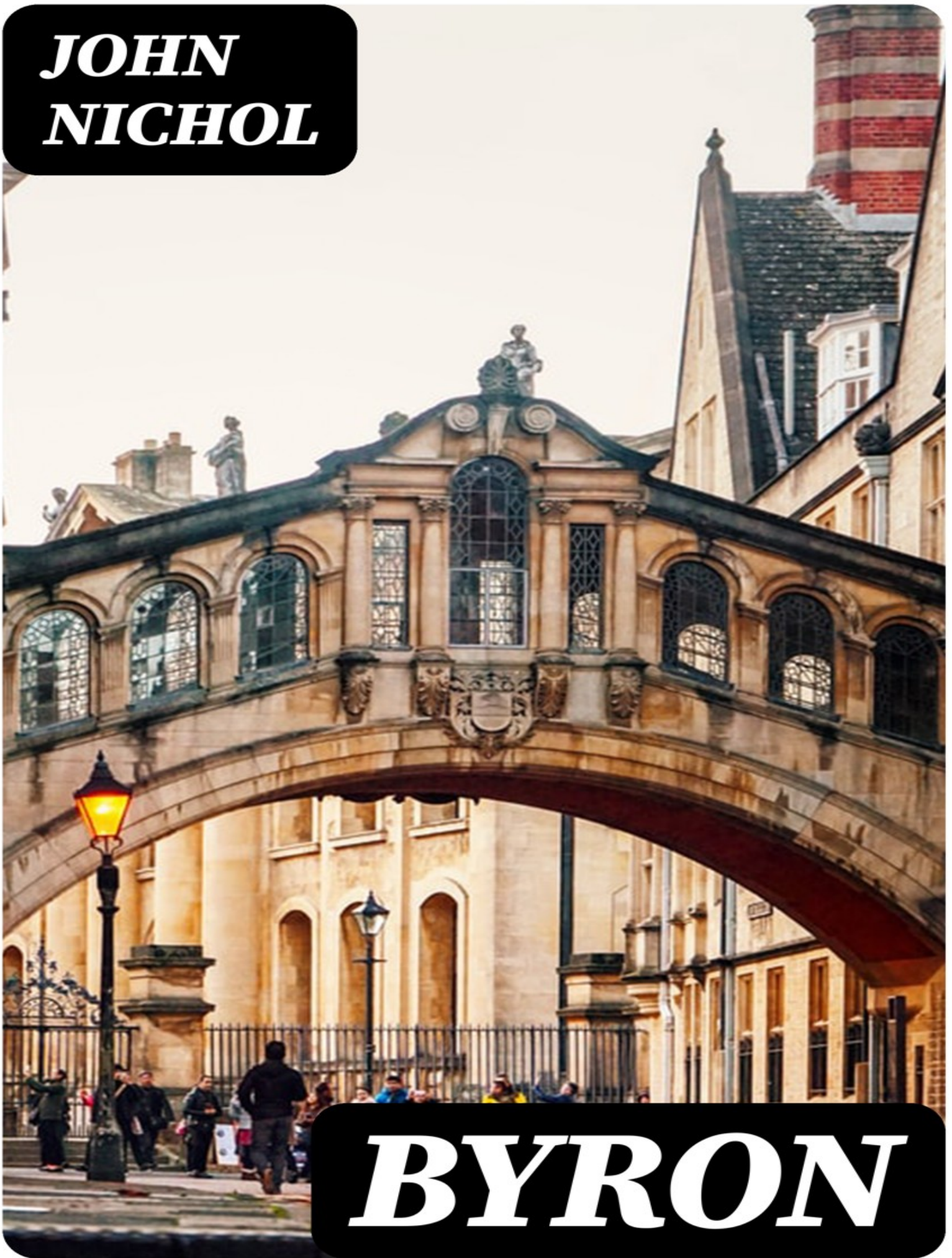


**JOHN
NICHOL**



BYRON

John Nichol

Byron

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CHAPTER I.

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ANCESTRY AND FAMILY.

Byron's life was passed under the fierce light that beats upon an intellectual throne. He succeeded in making himself—what he wished to be—the most notorious personality in the world of letters of our century. Almost every one who came in contact with him has left on record various impressions of intimacy or interview. Those whom he excluded or patronized, maligned; those to whom he was genial, loved him. Mr. Southey, in all sincerity, regarded him as the principle of Evil incarnate; an American writer of tracts in the form of stories is of the same opinion: to the Countess Guiccioli he is an archangel. Mr. Carlyle considers him to have been a mere "sulky dandy." Goethe ranks him as the first English poet after Shakespeare, and is followed by the leading critics of France, Italy, and Spain. All concur in the admission that Byron was as proud of his race as of his verse, and that in unexampled measure the good and evil of his nature were inherited and inborn. His genealogy is, therefore, a matter of no idle antiquarianism.

There are legends of old Norse Buruns migrating from their home in Scandinavia, and settling, one branch in Normandy, another in Livonia. To the latter belonged a

distant Marshal de Burun, famous for the almost absolute power he wielded in the then infant realm of Russia. Two members of the family came over with the Conqueror, and settled in England. Of Erneis de Burun, who had lands in York and Lincoln, we hear little more. Ralph, the poet's ancestor, is mentioned in Domesday Book—our first authentic record—as having estates in Nottinghamshire and Derby. His son Hugh was lord of Horestan Castle in the latter county, and with his son of the same name, under King Stephen, presented the church of Ossington to the monks of Lenton. The latter Hugh joined their order; but the race was continued by his son Sir Roger, who gave lands to the monastery of Swinstead. This brings us to the reign of Henry II. (1155-1189), when Robert de Byron adopted the spelling of his name afterwards retained, and by his marriage with Cecilia, heir of Sir Richard Clayton, added to the family possessions an estate; in Lancashire, where, till the time of Henry VIII., they fixed their seat. The poet, relying on old wood-carvings at Newstead, claims for some of his ancestors a part in the crusades, and mentions a name not apparently belonging to that age—

Near Ascalon's towers, John of Horestan slumbers—
a romance, like many of his, possibly founded on fact,
but incapable of verification.

Two grandsons of Sir Robert have a more substantial fame, having served with distinction in the wars of Edward I. The elder of these was governor of the city of York. Some members of his family fought at Cressy, and one of his sons, Sir John, was knighted by Edward III. at the siege of Calais. Descending through the other, Sir Richard, we come to

another Sir John, knighted by Richmond, afterwards Henry VII., on his landing at Milford. He fought, with his kin, on the field of Bosworth, and dying without issue, left the estates to his brother, Sir Nicholas, knighted in 1502, at the marriage of Prince Arthur. The son of Sir Nicholas, known as "little Sir John of the great beard," appears to have been a favourite of Henry VIII., who made him Steward of Manchester and Lieutenant of Sherwood, and on the dissolution of the monasteries presented him with the Priory of Newstead, the rents of which were equivalent to about 4000*l.* of our money. Sir John, who stepped into the Abbey in 1540, married twice, and the premature appearance of a son by the second wife—widow of Sir George Halgh—brought the bar sinister of which so much has been made. No indication of this fact, however, appears in the family arms, and it is doubtful if the poet was aware of a reproach which in any case does not touch his descent. The "filius naturalis," John Byron of Clayton, inherited by deed of gift, and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1579. His descendants were prominent as staunch Royalists during the whole period of the Civil Wars. At Edgehill there were seven Byrons on the field.

On Marston, with Rupert 'gainst traitors contending,
Four brothers enrich'd with their blood the bleak field.

Sir Nicholas, one of the seven, is extolled as "a person of great affability and dexterity, as well as martial knowledge, which gave great life to the designs of the well affected." He was taken prisoner by the Parliament while acting as governor of Chester. Under his nephew, Sir John, Newstead is said to have been besieged and taken; but the knight

escaped, in the words of the poet—never a Radical at heart
—a "protecting genius,

For nobler combats here reserved his life,
To lead the band where godlike Falkland foil."

Clarendon, indeed, informs us, that on the morning before the battle, Falkland, "very cheerful, as always upon action, put himself into the first rank of the Lord Byron's regiment." This slightly antedates his title. The first battle of Newbury was fought on September, 1643. For his services there, and at a previous royal victory, over Waller in July, Sir John was, on October 24th of the same year, created Baron of Rochdale, and so became the first Peer of the family.

This first lord was succeeded by his brother Richard (1605-1079), famous in the war for his government and gallant defence of Newark. He rests in the vault that now contains the dust of the greatest of his race, Hucknall Torkard Church, where his epitaph records the fact that the family lost all their present fortunes by their loyalty, adding, "yet it pleased God so to bless the humble endeavours of the said Richard, Lord Byron, that he repurchased part of their ancient inheritance, which he left to his posterity, with a laudable memory for his great piety and charity." His eldest son, William, the third Lord (died 1695), is worth remembering on two accounts. He married Elizabeth, the daughter of Viscount Chaworth, and so wove the first link in a strange association of tragedy and romance: he was a patron of one of those poets who, approved by neither gods nor columns, are remembered by the accident of an accident, and was himself a poetaster, capable of the couplet,—

My whole ambition only does extend
To gain the name of Shipman's faithful friend,—
an ambition which, considering its moderate scope, may
be granted to have attained its desire.

His successor, the fourth lord (1669-1736), gentleman of the bedchamber to Prince George of Denmark, himself living a quiet life, became, by his third wife, Frances, daughter of Lord Berkeley, the progenitor of a strange group of eccentric, adventurous, and passionate spirits. The eldest son, the fifth lord, and immediate predecessor in the peerage of the poet, was born in 1722, entered the naval service, left his ship, the "Victory," just before she was lost on the rocks of Alderney, and subsequently became master of the stag-hounds. In 1765, the year of the passing of the American Stamp Act, an event occurred which coloured the whole of his after-life, and is curiously illustrative of the manners of the time. On January 26th or 29th (accounts vary) ten members of an aristocratic social club sat down to dinner in Pall-mall. Lord Byron and Mr. Chaworth, his neighbour and kinsman, were of the party. In the course of the evening, when the wine was going round, a dispute arose between them about the management of game, so frivolous that one conjectures the quarrel to have been picked to cloak some other cause of offence. Bets were offered, and high words passed, but the company thought the matter had blown over. On going out, however, the disputants met on the stairs, and one of the two, it is uncertain which, cried out to the waiter to show them an empty room. This was done, and a single tallow candle being placed on the table, the door was shut. A few minutes

later a bell was rung, and the hotel master rushing in, Mr. Chaworth was found mortally wounded. There had been a struggle in the dim light, and Byron, having received the first lunge harmlessly in his waistcoat, had shortened his sword and run his adversary through the body, with the boast, not uncharacteristic of his grand nephew, "By G-d, I have as much courage as any man in England." A coroner's inquest was held, and he was committed to the Tower on a charge of murder. The interest in the trial which subsequently took place in Westminster Hall, was so great that tickets of admission were sold for six guineas. The peers, after two days' discussion, unanimously returned a verdict of manslaughter. Byron, pleading his privileges, and paying his fees, was set at liberty; but he appears henceforth as a spectre-haunted man, roaming about under false names, or shut up in the Abbey like a baited savage, shunned by his fellows high and low, and the centre of the wildest stories. That he shot a coachman, and flung the body into the carriage beside his wife, who very sensibly left him; that he tried to drown her; that he had devils to attend him—were among the many weird legends of "the wicked lord." The poet himself says that his ancestor's only companions were the crickets that used to crawl over him, receive stripes with straws when they misbehaved, and on his death made an exodus in procession from the house. When at home he spent his time in pistol-shooting, making sham fights with wooden ships about the rockeries of the lake, and building ugly turrets on the battlements. He hated his heir presumptive, sold the estate of Rochdale,—a proceeding afterwards challenged—and cut down the trees

of Newstead, to spite him; but he survived his three sons, his brother, and his only grandson, who was killed in Corsica in 1794.

On his own death in 1798, the estates and title passed to George Gordon, then a child of ten, whom he used to talk of, without a shadow of interest, as "the little boy who lives at Aberdeen." His sister Isabella married Lord Carlisle, and became the mother of the fifth Earl, the poet's nominal guardian. She was a lady distinguished for eccentricity of manners, and (like her son satirized in the *Bards and Reviewers*) for the perpetration of indifferent verses. The career of the fourth lord's second son, John, the poet's grandfather, recalls that of the sea-kings from whom the family claim to have sprung. Born in 1723, he at an early age entered the naval service, and till his death in 1786 was tossed from storm to storm. "He had no rest on sea, nor I on shore," writes his illustrious descendant. In 1740 a fleet of five ships was sent out under Commodore Anson to annoy the Spaniards, with whom we were then at war, in the South Seas. Byron took service as a midshipman in one of those ships—all more or less unfortunate—called "The Wager." Being a bad sailor, and heavily laden, she was blown from her company, and wrecked in the Straits of Magellan. The majority of the crew were cast on a bleak rock, which they christened Mount Misery. After encountering all the horrors of mutiny and famine, and being in various ways deserted, five of the survivors, among them Captain Cheap and Mr. Byron, were taken by some Patagonians to the Island of Chiloe, and thence, after some months, to Valparaiso. They were kept for nearly two years as prisoners at St. Iago, the

capital of Chili, and in December, 1744, put on board a French frigate, which reached Brest in October, 1745. Early in 1746 they arrived at Dover in a Dutch vessel.

This voyage is the subject of a well-known apostrophe in *The Pleasures of Hope*, beginning—

And such thy strength-inspiring aid that bore The
hardy Byron from his native shore. In torrid climes,
where Chiloe's tempests sweep Tumultuous murmurs
o'er the troubled deep, 'Twas his to mourn
misfortune's rudest shock, Scourged by the winds and
cradled by the rock.

Byron's own account of his adventures, published in 1768, is remarkable for freshness of scenery like that of our first literary traveller, Sir John Mandeville, and a force of description which recalls Defoe. It interests us more especially from the use that has been made of it in that marvellous mosaic of voyages, the shipwreck, in *Don Juan*, the hardships of his hero being, according to the poet—

Comparative

To those related in my grand-dad's narrative.

In June, 1764, Byron sailed with two ships, the "Dolphin" and the "Tamar," on a voyage of discovery arranged by Lord Egmont, to seek a southern continent, in the course of which he took possession of the largest of the Falkland Islands, again passed through the Magellanic Straits, and sailing home by the Pacific, circumnavigated the globe. The planets so conspired that, though his affable manners and considerate treatment made him always popular with his men, sailors became afraid to serve under "foul-weather

Jack." In 1748 he married the daughter of a Cornish squire, John Trevanion. They had two sons and three daughters. One of the latter married her cousin (the fifth lord's eldest son), who died in 1776, leaving as his sole heir the youth who fell in the Mediterranean in 1794.

The eldest son of the veteran, John Byron, father of the poet, was born in 1751, educated at Westminster, and, having received a commission, became a captain in the guards; but his character, fundamentally unprincipled, soon developed itself in such a manner as to alienate him from his family. In 1778, under circumstances of peculiar effrontery, he seduced Amelia D'Arcy, the daughter of the Earl of Holderness, in her own right Countess Conyers, then wife of the Marquis of Carmarthen, afterwards Duke of Leeds. "Mad Jack," as he was called, seems to have boasted of his conquest; but the marquis, to whom his wife had hitherto been devoted, refused to believe the rumours that were afloat, till an intercepted letter, containing a remittance of money, for which Byron, in reverse of the usual relations, was always clamouring, brought matters to a crisis. The pair decamped to the continent; and in 1779, after the marquis had obtained a divorce, they were regularly married. Byron seems to have been not only profligate but heartless, and he made life wretched to the woman he was even more than most husbands bound to cherish. She died in 1784, having given birth to two daughters. One died in infancy; the other was Augusta, the half sister and good genius of the poet, whose memory remains like a star on the fringe of a thunder-cloud, only brighter by the passing of the smoke of calumny. In 1807

she married Colonel Leigh, and had a numerous family, most of whom died young. Her eldest daughter, Georgiana, married Mr. Henry Trevanion. The fourth, Medora, had an unfortunate history, the nucleus of an impertinent and happily ephemeral romance.

The year after the death of his first wife, John Byron, who seems to have had the fascinations of a Barry Lyndon, succeeded in entrapping a second. This was Miss Catherine Gordon of Gight, a lady with considerable estates in Aberdeenshire—which attracted the adventurer—and an overweening Highland pride in her descent from James I., the greatest of the Stuarts, through his daughter Annabella, and the second Earl of Huntly. This union suggested the ballad of an old rhymer, beginning—

O whare are ye gaen, bonny Miss Gordon,
O whare are ye gaen, sae bonny and braw?
Ye've married, ye've married wi' Johnny Byron,
To squander the lands o' Gight awa'.

The prophecy was soon fulfilled. The property of the Scotch heiress was squandered with impetuous rapidity by the English rake. In 1780 she left Scotland for France, and returned to England toward the close of the following year. On the 22nd of January, 1788, in Holles Street, London, Mrs. Byron gave birth to her only child, George Gordon, sixth Lord. Shortly after, being pressed by his creditors, the father abandoned both, and leaving them with a pittance of 150 / a year, fled to Valenciennes, where he died, in August, 1791.

CHAPTER II.

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EARLY YEARS AND SCHOOL LIFE.

Soon after the birth of her son, Mrs. Byron took him to Scotland. After spending some time with a relation, she, early in 1790, settled in a small house at Aberdeen. Ere long her husband, who had in the interval dissipated away his remaining means, rejoined her; and they lived together in humble lodgings, until their tempers, alike fiery and irritable, compelled a definite separation. They occupied apartments, for some time, at the opposite ends of the same street, and interchanged visits. Being accustomed to meet the boy and his nurse, the father expressed a wish that the former should be sent to live with him, at least for some days. "To this request," Moore informs us, "Mrs. Byron was at first not very willing to accede; but, on the representation of the nurse that if he kept him over one night he would not do so another, she consented. On inquiring next morning after the child, she was told by Captain Byron that he had had quite enough of his young visitor." After a short stay in the north, the Captain, extorting enough money from his wife to enable him to fly from his creditors, escaped to France. His absence must have been a relief; but his death is said to have so affected

the unhappy lady, that her shrieks disturbed the neighbourhood. The circumstance recalls an anecdote of a similar outburst—attested by Sir W. Scott, who was present on the occasion—before her marriage. Being present at a representation, in Edinburgh, of the *Fatal Marriage*, when Mrs. Siddons was personating Isabella, Miss Gordon was seized with a fit, and carried out of the theatre, screaming out "O my Biron, my Biron." All we know of her character shows it to have been not only proud, impulsive, and wayward, but hysterical. She constantly boasted of her descent, and clung to the courtesy title of "honourable," to which she had no claim. Her affection and anger were alike demonstrative, her temper never for an hour secure. She half worshipped, half hated, the blackguard to whom she was married, and took no steps to protect her property; her son she alternately petted and abused. "Your mother's a fool!" said a school companion to him years after. "I know it," was his unique and tragic reply. Never was poet born to so much illustrious, and to so much bad blood. The records of his infancy betray the temper which he preserved through life—passionate, sullen, defiant of authority, but singularly amenable to kindness. On being scolded by his first nurse for having soiled a dress, without uttering a word he tore it from top to seam, as he had seen his mother tear her caps and gowns; but her sister and successor in office, May Gray, acquired and retained a hold over his affections, to which he has borne grateful testimony. To her training is attributed the early and remarkable knowledge of the Scriptures, especially of the Psalms, which he possessed: he was, according to her later testimony, peculiarly inquisitive

and puzzling about religion. Of the sense of solitude, induced by his earliest impressions, he characteristically makes a boast. "My daughter, my wife, my half-sister, my mother, my sister's mother, my natural daughter, and myself, are or were all only children. But the fiercest animals have the fewest numbers in their litters, as lions, tigers, &c."

To this practical orphanhood, and inheritance of feverish passion, there was added another, and to him a heavy and life-long burden. A physical defect in a healthy nature may either pass without notice or be turned to a high purpose. No line of his work reveals the fact that Sir Walter Scott was lame. The infirmity failed to cast even a passing shade over that serene power. Milton's blindness is the occasion of the noblest prose and verse of resignation in the language. But to understand Pope, we must remember that he was a cripple: and Byron never allows us to forget, because he himself never forgot it. Accounts differ as to the extent and origin of his deformity; and the doubts on the matter are not removed by the inconsistent accounts of the indelicate post-mortem examination made by Mr. Trelawny at Mesolonghi. It is certain that one of the poet's feet was, either at birth or at a very early period, so seriously clubbed or twisted as to affect his gait, and to a considerable extent his habits. It also appears that the surgical means—boots, bandages, &c.—adopted to straighten the limb, only aggravated the evil. His sensitiveness on the subject was early awakened by careless or unfeeling references. "What a pretty boy Byron is," said a friend of his nurse. "What a pity he has such a leg." On which the child, with flashing eyes, cutting at her with a baby's whip, cried out, "Dinna speak of it." His

mother herself, in her violent fits, when the boy ran round the room laughing at her attempts to catch him, used to say he was a little dog, as bad as his father, and to call him "a lame brat"—an incident, which, notoriously suggested the opening scene of the *Deformed Transformed*. In the height of his popularity he fancied that the beggars and street-sweepers in London were mocking him. He satirized and discouraged dancing; he preferred riding and swimming to other exercises, because they concealed his weakness; and on his death-bed asked to be blistered in such a way that he might not be called on to expose it. The Countess Guiccioli, Lady Blessington, and others, assure us that in society few would have observed the defect if he had not referred to it; but it was never far from the mind, and therefore never far from the mouth, of the least reticent of men.

In 1792 he was sent to a rudimentary day school of girls and boys, taught by a Mr. Bowers, where he seems to have learnt nothing save to repeat monosyllables by rote. He next passed through the hands of a devout and clever clergyman, named Ross, under whom according to his own account he made astonishing progress, being initiated into the study of Roman history, and taking special delight in the battle of Regillus. Long afterwards, when standing on the heights of Tusculum and looking down on the little round lake, he remembered his young enthusiasm and his old instructor. He next came under the charge of a tutor called Paterson, whom he describes as "a very serious, saturnine, but kind young man. He was the son of my shoemaker, but a good scholar. With him I began Latin, and continued till I went to the grammar school, where I threaded all the

classes to the fourth, when I was recalled to England by the demise of my uncle."

Of Byron's early school days there is little further record. We learn from scattered hints that he was backward in technical scholarship, and low in his class, in which he seems to have had no ambition to stand high; but that he eagerly took to history and romance, especially luxuriating in the *Arabian Nights*. He was an indifferent penman, and always disliked mathematics; but was noted by masters and mates as of quick temper, eager for adventures, prone to sports, always more ready to give a blow than to take one, affectionate, though resentful.

When his cousin was killed at Corsica, in 1794, he became the next heir to the title. In 1797, a friend, meaning to compliment the boy, said, "We shall have the pleasure some day of reading your speeches in the House of Commons," he, with precocious consciousness, replied, "I hope not. If you read any speeches of mine, it will be in the House of Lords." Similarly, when, in the course of the following year, the fierce old man at Newstead died, and the young lord's name was called at school with "Dominus" prefixed to it, his emotion was so great that he was unable to answer, and burst into tears.

Belonging to this period is the somewhat shadowy record of a childish passion for a distant cousin slightly his senior, Mary Duff, with whom he claims to have fallen in love in his ninth year. We have a quaint picture of the pair sitting on the grass together, the girl's younger sister beside them playing with a doll. A German critic gravely remarks, "This strange phenomenon places him beside Dante." Byron

himself, dilating on the strength of his attachment, tells us that he used to coax a maid to write letters for him, and that when he was sixteen, on being informed, by his mother, of Mary's marriage, he nearly fell into convulsions. But in the history of the calf-loves of poets it is difficult to distinguish between the imaginative afterthought and the reality. This equally applies to other recollections of later years. Moore remarks—"that the charm of scenery, which derives its chief power from fancy and association, should be felt at an age when fancy is yet hardly awake and associations are but few, can with difficulty be conceived." But between the ages of eight and ten, an appreciation of external beauty is sufficiently common. No one doubts the accuracy of Wordsworth's account, in the *Prelude* of his early half-sensuous delight in mountain glory. It is impossible to define the influence of Nature, either on nations or individuals, or to say beforehand what selection from his varied surroundings a poet will for artistic purposes elect to make. Shakespeare rests in meadows and glades, and leaves to Milton "Teneriffe and Atlas." Burns, who lived for a considerable part of his life in daily view of the hills of Arran, never alludes to them. But, in this respect like Shelley, Byron was inspired by a passion for the high-places of the earth. Their shadow is on half his verse. "The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow" perpetually remind him of one of his constantly recurring refrains,—

He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below.

In the course of 1790, after an attack of scarlet fever at Aberdeen he was taken by his mother to Ballater, and on his

recovery spent much of his time in rambling about the country. "From this period," he says, "I date my love of mountainous countries. I can never forget the effect, years afterwards, in England, of the only thing I had long seen, even in miniature, of a mountain, in the Malvern Hills. After I returned to Cheltenham I used to watch them every afternoon, at sunset, with a sensation which I cannot describe." Elsewhere, in *The Island* he returns, amid allusions to the Alps and Apennines, to the friends of his youth:—

The infant rapture still survived the boy,
And Lach-na-gair with Ida look'd o'er Troy,
Mixed Celtic memories with the Phrygian mount,
And Highland linns with Castalie's clear fount.

The poet, owing to his physical defect, was not a great climber, and we are informed, on the authority of his nurse, that he never even scaled the easily attainable summit of the "steep frowning" hill of which he has made such effective use. But the impression of it from a distance was none the less genuine. In the midst of a generous address, in *Don Juan*, to Jeffrey, he again refers to the same associations with the country of his early training:—

But I am half a Scot by birth, and bred
A whole one; and my heart flies to my head
As "Auld Lang Syne" brings Scotland, one and all—
Scotch plaids, Scotch snoods, the blue hills and clear
streams,
The Dee, the Don, Balgounie's brig's black wall—
All my boy feelings, all my gentler dreams

Of what I then dreamt, clothed in their own pall,
Like Banquo's offspring...

Byron's allusions to Scotland are variable and inconsistent. His satire on her reviewers was sharpened by the show of national as well as personal antipathy; and when, about the time of its production, a young lady remarked that he had a little of the northern manner of speech, he burst out "Good God! I hope not. I would rather the whole d—d country was sunk in the sea. I the Scotch accent!" But, in the passage from which we have quoted, the swirl of feeling on the other side continues,—

I rail'd at Scots to show my wrath and wit,
Which must be own'd was sensitive and surly.
Yet 'tis in vain such sallies to permit;
They cannot quench young feelings, fresh and early.
I scotch'd, not kill'd, the Scotchman in my blood,
And love the land of mountain and of flood.

This suggests a few words on a question of more than local interest. Byron's most careful biographer has said of him: "Although on his first expedition to Greece he was dressed in the tartan of the Gordon clan, yet the whole bent of his mind, and the character of his poetry, are anything but Scottish. Scottish nationality is tainted with narrow and provincial elements. Byron's poetic character, on the other hand, is universal and cosmopolitan. He had no attachment to localities, and never devoted himself to the study of the history of Scotland and its romantic legends." Somewhat similarly Thomas Campbell remarks of Burns, "he was the most un-Scotsmanlike of Scotchmen, having no caution." Rough national verdicts are apt to be superficial. Mr. Leslie

Stephen, in a review of Hawthorne, has commented on the extent to which the nobler qualities and conquering energy of the English character are hidden, not only from foreigners, but from ourselves, by the "detestable lay figure" of John Bull. In like manner, the obtrusive type of the "canny Scot" is apt to make critics forget the hot heart that has marked the early annals of the country, from the Hebrides to the Borders, with so much violence, and at the same time has been the source of so much strong feeling and persistent purpose. Of late years, the struggle for existence, the temptations of a too ambitious and over active people in the race for wealth, and the benumbing effect of the constant profession of beliefs that have ceased to be sincere, have for the most part stifled the fervid fire in calculating prudence. These qualities have been adequately combined in Scott alone, the one massive and complete literary type of his race. Burns, to his ruin, had only the fire: the same is true of Byron, whose genius, in some respects less genuine, was indefinitely and inevitably wider. His intensely susceptible nature took a dye from every scene, city, and society through which he passed; but to the last he bore with him the marks of a descendant of the Sea-Kings, and of the mad Gordons in whose domains he had first learned to listen to the sound of the "two mighty voices" that haunted and inspired him through life.

In the autumn of 1798 the family, i.e. his mother—who had sold the whole of her household furniture for 75 /—with himself, and a maid, set south. The poet's only recorded impression of the journey is a gleam of Loch Leven, to which he refers in one of his latest letters. He never revisited the

land of his childhood. Our next glimpse of him is on his passing the toll-bar of Newstead. Mrs. Byron asked the old woman who kept it, "Who is the next heir?" and on her answer "They say it is a little boy who lives at Aberdeen," "This is he, bless him!" exclaimed the nurse.

Returned to the ancestral Abbey, and finding it half ruined and desolate, they migrated for a time to the neighbouring Nottingham. Here the child's first experience was another course of surgical torture. He was placed under the charge of a quack named Lavender, who rubbed his foot in oil, and screwed it about in wooden machines. This useless treatment is associated with two characteristic anecdotes. One relates to the endurance which Byron, on every occasion of mere physical trial, was capable of displaying. Mr. Rogers, a private tutor, with whom he was reading passages of Virgil and Cicero, remarked, "It makes me uncomfortable, my lord, to see you sitting them in such pain as I know you must be suffering." "Never mind, Mr. Rogers." said the child, "you shall not see any signs of it in me." The other illustrates his precocious delight in detecting imposture. Having scribbled on a piece of paper several lines of mere gibberish, he brought them to Lavender, and gravely asked what language it was; and on receiving the answer "It is Italian," he broke into an exultant laugh at the expense of his tormentor. Another story survives, of his vindictive spirit giving birth to his first rhymes. A meddling old lady, who used to visit his mother and was possessed of a curious belief in a future transmigration to our satellite—the bleakness of whose scenery she had not realized—having given him some cause of offence, he stormed out to

his nurse that he "could not bear the sight of the witch," and vented his wrath in the quatrain.—

In Nottingham county there lives, at Swan Green,
As curst an old lady as ever was seen;
And when she does die, which I hope will be soon,
She firmly believes she will go to the moon.

The poet himself dates his "first dash into poetry" a year later (1800), from his juvenile passion for his cousin Margaret Parker, whose subsequent death from an injury caused by a fall he afterwards deplored in a forgotten elegy. "I do not recollect," he writes through the transfiguring mists of memory, "anything equal to the *transparent* beauty of my cousin, or to the sweetness of her temper, during the short period of our intimacy. She looked as if she had been made out of a rainbow—all beauty and peace. My passion had the usual effects upon me—I could not sleep; I could not eat; I could not rest. It was the texture of my life to think of the time that must elapse before we could meet again. But I was a fool then, and not much wiser now." *Sic transit secunda*.

The departure at a somewhat earlier date of May Gray for her native country, gave rise to evidence of another kind of affection. On her leaving he presented her with his first watch, and a miniature by Kay of Edinburgh, representing him with a bow and arrow in his hand and a profusion of hair over his shoulders. He continued to correspond with her at intervals. Byron was always beloved by his servants. This nurse afterwards married well, and during her last illness, in 1827, communicated to her attendant, Dr. Ewing of