

The fire that in my bosom preys,
Is like to some volcanic isle,
No torch is kindled at its blaze,
No funeral pile.

Misanthropy is the second distinguishing characteristic of Byron's poetry—it is equally characteristic of the poet, the secret in part of his great sway over his readers, and in its effects exceedingly pernicious. It spreads a gloom over the face of nature, renders daily duty irksome, predisposes to suspicion, undermines health, and seriously injures and deadens the moral powers. Indeed misanthropy may be styled the *lues Byronica*, the fatal fascination which, when it has once thoroughly enchained its victim, removes all power and all wish of escape. That Byron was constitutionally misanthropic is doubtless, to a certain extent, true, and thus far instead of being blamed, he is rather to be pitied. But the tendency of his writings is not on this account less pernicious. There is, however, a great deal of affected misanthropy and melancholy in his poems; for on no other hypothesis can we account for the singular inconsistency which he displays in cursing the world in one instant, spurning it from him with disdain, and the very next moment eagerly courting its notice, and bewailing its want of sympathy. If he was really and truly a Timon, it is impossible to reconcile his feelings with his actions; if he really despised the "world and the world's law," why was he, as Galt styles it, so "skinless" and sore when it turned against him? That was a very singular kind of solitude which could suffer itself to be broken in upon by such companions as usually surrounded him; which could be converted into a place of torture by a base squib from a stray London periodical. It was, in truth, the merest affectation of independence in Byron, to pretend to be above caring for the world's opinion. He of all men should never have thrown himself upon his dignity, and resolved never to read English works, he who literally, as somebody has said, "wept for the (English) press, and wiped his eyes with a proof sheet." And yet he was generally ready to assert his independence, and that sometimes in a style not the most courteous nor poetic:

"Dogs or men! (for I flatter you in saying
That ye are dogs—your betters far,) ye may
Read, or read not, what I am now essaying,
To shew ye what ye are in every way.
As little as the moon stops for the baying
Of wolves, will the bright muse withdraw one ray
From out her skies—then howl your idle wrath,
While she still silvers o'er your gloomy path.
Don Juan, canto. vii.

At the time these lines were written, he declares his "utter abhorrence of any contact with the travelling English," yet, as Galt remarks, "it was evi-

dent he was ill at ease with himself, and even dissatisfied that the world had not done him enough of wrong to justify his misanthropy." In truth, it was his own unbridled temper that had driven him from England, and from the society of those great lights of the age, whom in a fit of disappointed rage he had attacked wantonly, without the slightest provocation.

In tracing the various phases of this misanthropic moodiness, in the different characters whom Byron introduces in his poems, we shall be able to see how completely the feelings of the poet had been transfused into his heroes, and at the same time be able to form some idea of the mental suffering which Byron must have endured, and which made him literally a "homeless and desolate wanderer among strangers." That he was sincere in thus describing his own condition, can hardly admit of doubt, for there is an affecting air of reality in his melancholy complaints, that too strongly interests the feelings to allow them to be looked upon as fictitious:

I loved, but all I loved are gone;
Had friends—my friends are fled;
How cheerless feels the heart alone,
When all its former hopes are dead!

Fain would I fly the haunts of men,
I seek to shun, not hate mankind;
My breast requires the silent glen,
Whose gloom may suit a darken'd mind.

Sadly disordered must his mind have been, to have given vent to such feelings as these in the very prime of his youth; with fortune just beginning to smile upon him, with health on his cheek, and fame already half won.

In one of his most affecting poems, addressed to Augusta, and written after he had experienced how little enjoyment fame and ambition could confer, he seems to melt at the thought of what he had been, and to bend his proud spirit to repentance:

I feel almost at times as I have felt
In happy childhood; trees and flowers, and brooks,
Come as of yore upon me, and can melt
My heart with recognition of their looks.

I have outlived myself by many a day,
Having survived so many things that were;
My years have been no slumberer, but the prey
Of ceaseless vigils; for I had the share
Of life which might have filled a century,
Before its fourth in time had passed away.

The description he gave of MANFRED was of himself:

My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men,
Nor look'd upon the earth with human eyes;
The thirst of their ambition was not mine;