

But clouds instead, and ever 'during dark
Surround me—

But in all his poems we shall scarcely find another allusion to himself, unless it be in some of his sonnets, his lines to his wife, and his noble filial tribute to his father.

Byron's poetry is, in these respects, as different from that of these great masters, as the cast of his mind was inferior. It is saturated with selfishness. True as the needle to the pole, he speaks, travels, and writes, only for one purpose. Alas! he did more than speak and travel and write for the sake of selfish notoriety. He plunged into excesses which his better nature taught him to look upon as debasing and criminal. He affected to despise, as he actually trampled upon, not the conventional rules of society, merely, but the more sacred precepts of morality and virtue; he exposed to ridicule the sanctioned and acknowledged usages of society, broke through restraints which he had voluntarily assumed, and which, once submitted to, ought religiously to be observed. He was in fact a self-immolated victim, a gladiator battling with society, and in the face of a world which he affected to despise, playing the most fantastic tricks to attract attention; now cursing a heartless and unfeeling public, and now, in all the abandonment of unreturned sympathy, wailing that he was alone and desolate. This perpetual sacrifice at the shrine of self, is one of the most deplorable and fatal errors of Byron's life, and one which, while it has done much to corrupt and vitiate those who have really sympathized with him, yet has tended to weaken and tarnish, if not to destroy the reputation he once possessed. While the actor was alive, the public felt no slight interest in looking on, and even now it is not so much the egotism of Byron which disgusts, not so much his efforts to advance himself, as the anxiety he manifests to drag down every one else. Some egotists are most agreeable companions, and are not only tolerated but liked. It is, however, too much credulity to believe that the public, at least the best portion of the public, will derive much pleasure or profit from the outpourings of a diseased mind, from the wailings of wounded vanity, the sneers of disappointed ambition, the scoffs of an assumed scepticism, and the painful record, of half-accomplished plans, and fierce, joyless debauchery. With all these the poetry, and especially the correspondence of Byron, abounds. It seems as if Byron had not only been in a great degree regardless of that prudence which ought to regulate the confessions of an author, when writing for the public, but that he was entirely ignorant of human nature, and of the injurious influence which such unreserved confessions must ultimately have on his reputation as a man and a poet. From daily and hourly brooding over his plans and misfortunes, he supposed that

what was of highest interest to himself, would be equally interesting and agreeable to the public. Hence it was, (that like the Pharisees of old, when they were about to enter on their devotions,) he went into the public street and rang a bell to let the public know he was about to confess. But Byron's confessional was the press, where, alas! there is no oath of secrecy, and no absolution. So complete was Byron's delusion, so unreserved his confessions to the public, so insatiable his passion for notoriety, and such his vanity and love of self, that if these were then extant, a single line in relation to himself, except that which he himself wrote, his character and habits, his failings, his vices and his splendid talents, would be nearly as well known as they now are after the voluminous labours of his biographers. Indeed Byron is his own best biographer, and from his writings, nay even from his poems, those of them that were written *expressly for publication*, we can glean a faithful and most minute record of all he thought, did, and suffered in his wayward career. We have in these a record of his birth, an account of his early education, his childish sports and vexations, his first love, his earliest sacrifice to the muses, his silent, solitary wanderings, when in the first blush of boyhood,

He roam'd, a young Highlander, o'er the dark heath,
And climb'd thy steep summit, oh, Morven of Snow!

He paints, and oh how faithfully and fully, the strugglings of his better nature with an already morbid ambition, when from the seclusion of a university he looked with a beating heart and eagle eye on the "lofty seat of canonized bards." His young and ardent attachments, the pangs which followed his first appearance as an author, his revenge, his unfortunate marriage, his long and forlorn wanderings, his return, his renown, his satiety and disgust with society, his renewed wanderings, and the splendid but deceitful halo which gilded his last hours—do we not find all these recorded with a minuteness and feeling which leave no doubt of the accuracy of the descriptions? Other men, even in their most secret records of their experience, leave unnoticed some moods of mind, some actions ungrateful and irksome to be thought of; but Byron disclosed *all*. And what a fearful disclosure was it! what an awful mixture of the fiendish and godlike; of powerful and original talent, linked with grovelling passion, and cheerless unmitigated misery. Hear the conclusion of the whole matter, in the last lines Byron ever wrote, dated in Greece a few weeks before his death:

My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruits of love are gone,
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone.