

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE First and Second Cantos of CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE, published in 1812, at once ranked Byron among the great poets of his country. Referring to the suddenness with which the poem flashed upon the public eye, he says: "I went to bed one night, and got up to find myself famous."

Scott's three great romance poems had quickened the public appetite for poetry; and Byron's brilliant poetical diary, combining the interests of a romantic and striking individuality with picturesque descriptions of scenes and events which were then attracting the eyes of Europe, caught the public imagination, as it was becoming satiated with Scott's purely ideal creations.

Byron's plan, or, more properly, want of plan or combination in his structure, was admirably adapted to his disposition, and left him at perfect liberty in the choice of the subjects he took up, and his manner of treating them, provided the result was striking. The connecting thread of the poet's personality—the only continuous subject of the poem—is taken up or dropped at pleasure without loss of its interest.

Regarding Childe Harold's moral consistency, Byron candidly remarks, that "the poem" was intended as an example, further than to show that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones; and that even the beauties of nature and the stimulus of travel (the chief ambition, the most powerful of all excitements) are lost on a soul so constituted, or rather misdirected."

CHILDE was a title of nobility equivalent to lord. Childe Harold is believed to be Lord Byron himself, who was twenty-two when he began this poem and was seven years in finishing it.

TO IANTHE¹

Not in those climes where I have late been straying,²
Though Beauty long hath there been matchless deemed;
Not in those visions to the heart displaying
Forms which it sighs but to have only dreamed,
Hath aught like thee in truth or fancy seemed:
Nor, having seen thee, shall I vainly seek
To paint those charms which varied as they beamed:
To such as see thee not my words were weak;
To those who gaze on thee what language could they speak!

Ah! may'st thou ever be what now thou art,
Nor unbeseem³ the promise of thy spring,

¹ From Gr. *Ion*, a lily. The young beauty thus addressed, in her eleventh year, was Lady Charlotte Harley, daughter of the Earl of Oxford, and afterwards Lady C. Bacon. ² Spain, Portugal, Albania, and Greece. ³ *Unbeseem*, belie, disappoint; seldom used as a verb.