

popular poet. There was one field, one region of poetry, yet unexplored, and into it Byron was impelled, as well by the native bent of his mind, as by his peculiar habits and education. It was the region of Passion—a prolific region which had been overlooked by the more elegant poets of the Pope and Dryden school, and which was not strictly within the range of Scott. It was for Byron to explore and bring forth its treasures. In doing so, he did not address himself to the delicate, refined, and somewhat artificial taste which loves to revel in arcadian bowers, and to hear the beautiful harmonies of Nature chanted in elegant and polished periods. He cared not for the babbling of streams, flowery arbours, green fields, and trees with golden fruit, and “flowers such as in Eden bloom’d of old;” nor did he draw from the world of romance, from grey chronicles, and superstitious tales of more modern origin. The world of passion *within* was his field. It was to the sternest, gloomiest, and most powerful feelings of the heart that Byron appealed. In this his great strength lay, and it was this which at once raised him, in the eye of the mass, far above all his cotemporaries. There was a vigor, and a freshness in his works, which was the more apparent and striking, as contrasted with the more studied and formal beauty of his predecessors, something which rivetted the mind even in the stormiest times of political and civil discords. Men read, and gazed, and admired. The oracle too sat apart, shrouded in mystery, and its responses were listened to with the more attention, and a reverence approaching to awe or fear. Periodicals teemed with imitations of his peculiar style, critics tried to outdo each other in flattering sycophancy, and it was no wonder that the warnings of the moralist were unheard in the universal shout of applause which sounded throughout Europe during his life, and which, after his death, disarmed the criticism and reprobation with which a moral and thinking people never fail, sooner or later, to regard the disappointed and ambitious sceptic, whatever may be his talents.

Twenty years have not passed away since Byron’s death, and yet in how very different a light is he now looked upon, both as a poet and as a man. His renown has faded, and the Byronic, in mind, manners or poetry, has passed, with the best part of mankind, into a synonyme for all that is misanthropic, vain and sceptical. A close observer, even in the palmiest days of Byron’s greatness, might have predicted that this would be the case. Indeed the prediction was more than once uttered by those who best knew his lordship, and whose high and established reputation left no room to suspect, that envy or jealousy had given rise to the prediction. It was a truth *then*, as it is now, and ever will be, as long as man remains constituted as he now is, that to stand the test of time, poetry must address itself to something higher and holier than the passions. It must lay

hold on the gentler and better feelings, on that which constitutes the *humanity* in man, on man as a being, erring, it may be, and sinful, but still a moral and religious being. True poetry speaks not to the impure, or if it do speak to them, it is in language which they cannot understand. Talent may throw a glare of nebulous light around the productions of the sensualist; skill may arrange the drapery so as to conceal the loathsome figure within; gorgeous and brilliant imagery may dazzle and bewilder; and for a time gilded vice, or gloomy misanthropic scepticism, be passed off at least for wit, and a generous freedom of opinion, if not for virtue—but the delusion will soon be dispelled, and the charm broken.

The three great defects in Byron’s character, and which appear so conspicuously in his writings, were vanity, misanthropy and scepticism. His vanity, strange as it may seem, was yet co-existent with no small degree of pride; indeed so closely were those opposites united in Byron, that it is difficult to say which was the root and which the branch. “I am naturally an aristocrat,” said he, in an attack on Southey, and it was the truth; he was an aristocrat, and so much was he alive to what he considered his dignity, that his most intimate acquaintance were often surprised at finding themselves shunned by his lordship for some omission of the merest punctilios of ceremony. By long habits of morbid self-communion, he had conceived exceeding false notions of his own consequence, and hence he often exacted more consideration than was his due. In 1809, just before he went abroad, he went to take his seat in the House of Lords, and with a singularity in consonance with his character, presented himself at the bar of the House alone. Lord Eldon, the Chancellor, seeing him abashed and pale, quitted his seat, and went towards him with a smile, expressing at the same time, with becoming courtesy, his regret that the rules of the House had obliged him to call for the evidence of his grandfather’s marriage. “Your lordship has done your duty and no more,” said Byron, making a stiff bow, and touching with the tip of his fingers the Chancellor’s hand. Another instance of the same ridiculous pride is found in his lordship’s stretching over from Girgente to Malta, when on his way to Patras, expecting a salute from the lamented Sir Alexander Ball, then Governor of Malta. The guns were of course mute, and after waiting some time, his lordship turned away with a petulance and vexation which he took no pains to conceal. On his return from abroad he exhibited another proof of his weakness, on his first appearance as a speaker in the House of Lords. On this occasion, he recited a speech on the Nottingham riots, which he had previously written with great care, and committed to memory. It was just such a speech as any young nobleman might have written, sparkling, flowery, and on the whole rather common-place. In Byron’s