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RETROSPECTIVE REVIEWS.

BY A. R.

BYRON.

[Born in London, 22d January, 1788—From 1790 to 1798 resided in Scotland—Wrote his first poetry in 1800—At Harrow School four years—At Cambridge University composed *Hours of Idleness*—In 1803 wrote *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*—July 1809, embarks for Lisbon—September 1809, lands in Greece—March 1810, leaves Athens for Smyrna—May at Constantinople—Tour in the Morea—July 1811, arrives in London—1812, *Childe Harold* published—1813, wrote *Gaiour and the Bride of Abydos*—1814, published the *Corsair and Lara*—2d January, 1815, married Miss Milbanke—April 1816, sails for Ostend—Visits the Plains of Waterloo—September 1816, in Switzerland, engaged on third canto of *Childe Harold*, Manfred, and the Prisoner of Chillon—At Venice two or three years—Finished *Childe Harold*—1819, removes to Ravenna—Intimacy with the Countess Guiccioli—Wrote *Prophecy of Dante*, *Sardanapalus and Cain*—1821, removes to Pisa, wrote *Werner*, the Deformed Transformed, last Cantos of *Don Juan*—September 1822, removes to Genoa—writes for the "Liberal"—August 1823, arrives at Capalonia—joins the Greek cause—Arrives at Missolonghi 5th January, 1824—Byron's Suliote Brigade formed—Forms scheme of going to the United States as Ambassador or Agent of the Greeks—1824, April 9, seized with fever—12th, confined to his bed—16th, becomes worse—six o'clock, morning of the 19th, died—Body embalmed—2d May sent to Zante—26th June, reached the Downs,—buried privately at Huckwell, two miles from Newstead Abbey.]

THE career of Byron was as brilliant as it was brief. Like the eccentric meteor, he flashed across the literary horizon, attracting for a time the admiration and awe of the world, and then suddenly disappearing while they gazed. The unprecedented popularity of Lord Byron's writings on their first publication, may be satisfactorily accounted for, apart from their real intrinsic merits, as the production of superior poetical talent, by the peculiar circumstances of the times, and the interest which attached to Byron as a man, and distinguished him from the poets of his day. Descended, by his father's side, from one of the noblest and most renowned Norman families that came over with William the Conqueror, and by his maternal ancestors, from the ill-fated race of the Scottish kings, the meed of distinction was more than half won, before he himself had done anything to merit it. His birth and title obtained for him a hearing at once, by exciting the public curiosity, and in his first publication Byron took care that every thing connected with it should deepen the impression. It was published in an obscure town, in a style of affected plainness, which was meant as a contrast to the embellished form usually adopted by noble authors. He, as it were, stripped himself of the trappings of birth and title, and descended into the arena to contend with equals for the high meed of fame. His extreme youth, (which he somewhat ostentatiously pleaded as an extenuation of his faults,) coupled with the

infamous notoriety of his father, and the renown of his grandfather the "Hardy Byron," were well known to the public, and when Gifford in the *Edinburgh Review* attacked the "*Hours of Idleness*" with unnecessary severity, the public, with a praiseworthy generosity, took sides with the Poet against the Reviewer. This popularity, which was still farther increased by the scorching reply which soon after appeared in the *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, never forsook Byron during his brief and wayward career. But it was not the title nor the youth of the poet that alone assisted in bringing him thus favourably into public view; it was the kind or *genus* of the poetry, even more than its intrinsic merit, considered as poetry in the abstract. When Byron was prominently before the public, almost the only poetry which had appeared for a long time was that which may not improperly be called romance in verse. It was the descriptive and narrative, the outwardly passionate, which reached its utmost perfection, as in one sense it may be said to have had its origin, in Sir Walter Scott. The public, however, had had enough of this kind of poetry; it had long before been satiated with the didactic, prosaic verse, which had made way for itself, more by the high polish of the language, and weight of sentiment, than by any merit strictly poetical. Woodsworth had published much, but had been bitterly opposed by the literary censors of the day, and, besides, Woodsworth never was intended to be a