

WORKS of Byron

In reading Byron it is well to remember that he was a disappointed and embittered man not only in his personal life, but also in his expectation of a general transformation of human society. As he pours out his own feelings, chiefly in his poetry he is the most expressive writer of his age in voicing the discontent of a multitude of Europeans who were disappointed at the failure of the French Revolution to produce an entirely new form of government and society.

One who wishes to understand the whole scope of Byron's genius and poetry will do well to begin with his first work 'Hours of Solitude' written when he was a young man at the university. There is very little poetry in the volume only a striking facility in rhyme, brightened by the devil-may-care spirit of the Cava-

lier poets but as a revelation of the man himself it is remarkable. In a vain and sophomoric preface he declares that poetry is to him an idle experiment and that this is his first and last attempt to amuse himself in that line. Curiously enough as he starts for Greece on his last, fatal journey, he again ridicules literature and says that the poet is a "mere babbler". It is this despising of the art which alone makes him famous that occasions our deepest disappointment. Even in his magnificent passages, in a glowing description of nature or of a Hindoo woman's exquisite love, his work is frequently marred by a wretched pun or by some cheap buffoonery, which ruins our first splendid impression of his poetry. Byron's later volumes, 'Manfred and Cain', the one a curious, and perhaps

unconscious, 'parody of Faust' the other of 'Paradise Lost', are his two best known dramatic works. Aside from the question of their poetic value, they are interesting as voicing Byron's excessive individualism and his rebellion against society. The best known and the most readable of Byron's works are 'Mazeppa', 'The Prisoner of Chillon', and 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage'. The first two cantos of Childe Harold (1812) are perhaps more frequently read than any other work of the same author, partly because of their melodious verse, partly because of their descriptions of places along the line of European travel but the last two cantos (1816-1818) written after his exile from England, have more sincerity and are in every way better expressions of ~~Byron~~ Byron's mature genius.

Scattered through all his works one finds magnificent descriptions of natural scenery and exquisite lyrics of love and despair but they are mixed with such a deal of bombast and rhetoric together with much that is unwholesome that the beginner will do well to confine himself to a small volume of well chosen selections.

Byron is often compared with Scott, as having given to us Europe and the Orient just as Scott gave us Scotland and its people but while there is a certain resemblance in the swing and dash of the verses the resemblance is all on the surface and the underlying difference between the two poets is as great as that between Thackeray and Bulwer-Lytton. Scott knew his country well, - its hills and valleys which are interesting as the abode of living

and lovable men and women. Byron pretended to know the secret, unwholesome ~~side~~ side of Europe, which generally hides itself in the dark but instead of giving us a variety of living men, he never gets away from his own unbalanced and egotistical self. All his characters in Cain, Manfred, The Corsair, The Giaour, Childe Harold, Don Juan are five some repetitions of himself, — a vain, disappointed, cynical man, who finds no good in life or love or anything. Naturally, with such a disposition, he is entirely incapable of portraying a true woman. To nature alone, especially in her magnificent moods, Byron remains faithful and his portrayal of the night and the storm and the ocean in Childe Harold are unsurpassed in our language.

The end. //

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