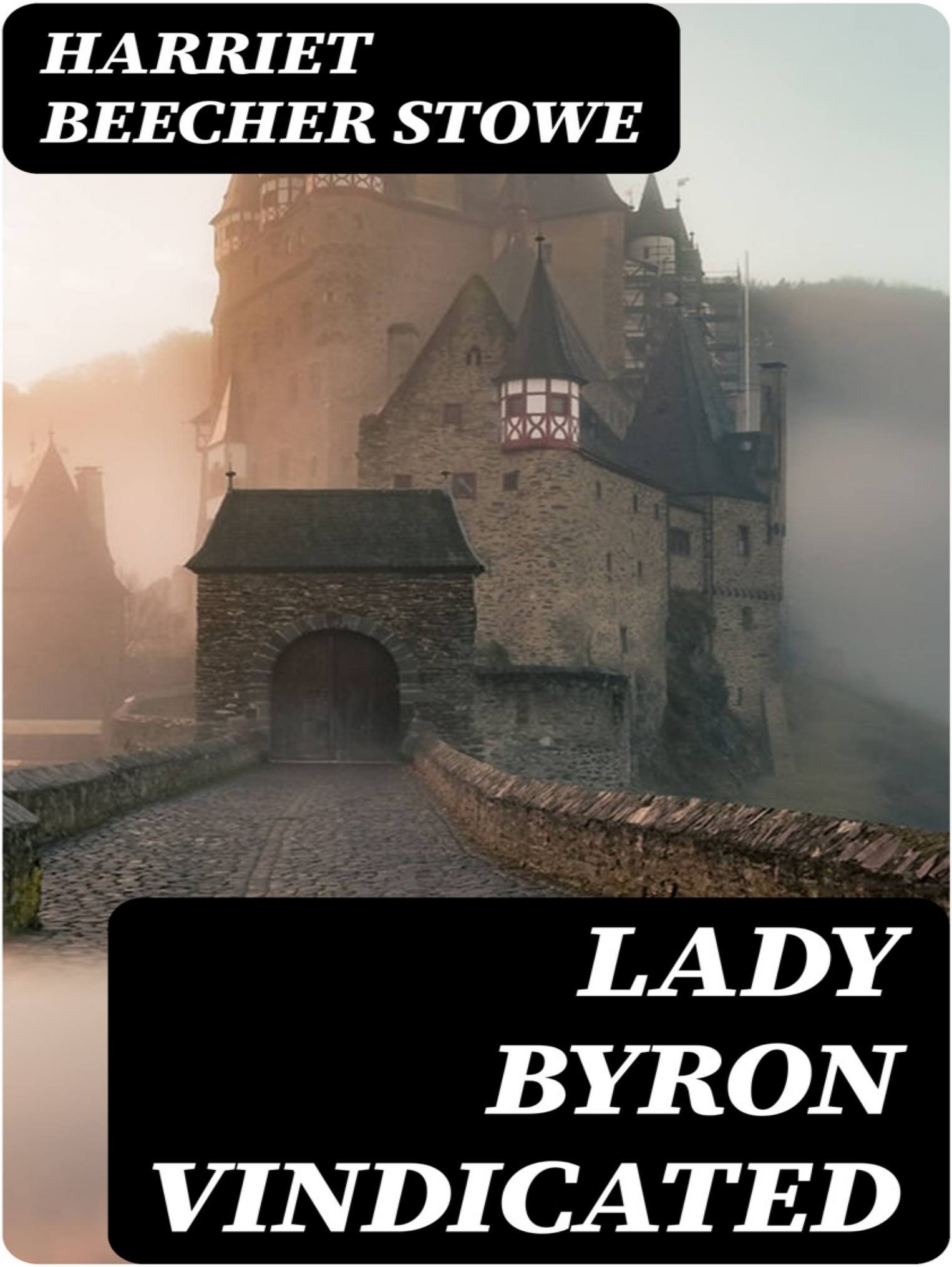
HARRIET BEECHER STOWE



LADY BYRON VINDICATED

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Lady Byron Vindicated

A history of the Byron controversy from its beginning in 1816 to the present time

EAN 8596547372189

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

PART I.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.

Table of Contents

The interval since my publication of ‘The True Story of Lady Byron’s Life’ has been one of stormy discussion and of much invective.

I have not thought it necessary to disturb my spirit and confuse my sense of right by even an attempt at reading the many abusive articles that both here and in England have followed that disclosure. Friends have undertaken the task for me, giving me from time to time the substance of anything really worthy of attention which came to view in the tumult.

It appeared to me essential that this first excitement should in a measure spend itself before there would be a possibility of speaking to any purpose. Now, when all would seem to have spoken who can speak, and, it is to be hoped, have said the utmost they can say, there seems a propriety in listening calmly, if that be possible, to what I have to say in reply.

And, first, why have I made this disclosure at all?

To this I answer briefly, Because I considered it my duty to make it.

I made it in defence of a beloved, revered friend, whose memory stood forth in the eyes of the civilised world charged with most repulsive crimes, of which I *certainly* knew her innocent.

I claim, and shall prove, that Lady Byron’s reputation has been the victim of a concerted attack, begun by her husband during her lifetime, and coming to its climax over her grave. I claim, and shall prove, that it was not I who stirred up this controversy in this year 1869. I shall show *who did do it*, and who is responsible for bringing on me that hard duty of making these disclosures, which it appears to me ought to have been made by others.

I claim that these facts were given to me unguarded by any promise or seal of secrecy, expressed or implied; that they were lodged with me as one sister rests her story with another for sympathy, for counsel, for defence. *Never* did I suppose the day would come that I should be subjected to so cruel an anguish as this use of them has been to me. Never did I suppose that,—when those kind hands, that had shed nothing but blessings, were lying in the helplessness of death, when that gentle heart, so sorely tried and to the last so full of love, was lying cold in the tomb,—a countryman in England could be found to cast the foulest slanders on her grave, and not one in all England to raise an effective voice in her defence.

I admit the feebleness of my plea, in point of execution. It was written in a state of exhausted health, when no labour of the kind was safe for me,—when my hand had not strength to hold the pen, and I was forced to dictate to another.

I have been told that I have no reason to congratulate myself on it as a literary effort. O my brothers and sisters! is there then nothing in the world to think of but literary efforts? I ask any man with a heart in his bosom, if he had

been obliged to tell a story so cruel, because his mother's grave gave no rest from slander,—I ask any woman who had been forced to such a disclosure to free a dead sister's name from grossest insults, whether she would have thought of making this work of bitterness a literary success?

Are the cries of the oppressed, the gasps of the dying, the last prayers of mothers,—are *any* words wrung like drops of blood from the human heart to be judged as literary efforts?

My fellow-countrymen of America, men of the press, I have done you one act of justice,—of all your bitter articles, I have read not one. I shall never be troubled in the future time by the remembrance of any unkind word you have said of me, for at this moment I recollect not one. I had such faith in you, such pride in my countrymen, as men with whom, above all others, the cause of woman was safe and sacred, that I was at first astonished and incredulous at what I heard of the course of the American press, and was silent, not merely from the impossibility of being heard, but from grief and shame. But reflection convinces me that you were, in many cases, acting from a misunderstanding of facts and through misguided honourable feeling; and I still feel courage, therefore, to ask from you a fair hearing. Now, as I have done you this justice, will you also do me the justice to hear me seriously and candidly?

What interest have you or I, my brother and my sister, in this short life of ours, to utter anything but the truth? Is not truth between man and man and between man and woman the foundation on which all things rest? Have you not, every individual of you, who must hereafter give an account

yourself alone to God, an interest to know the exact truth in this matter, and a duty to perform as respects that truth? Hear me, then, while I tell you the position in which I stood, and what was my course in relation to it.

A shameless attack on my friend's memory had appeared in the 'Blackwood' of July 1869, branding Lady Byron as the vilest of criminals, and recommending the Guiccioli book to a Christian public as interesting from the very fact that it was the avowed production of Lord Byron's mistress. No efficient protest was made against this outrage in England, and Littell's 'Living Age' reprinted the 'Blackwood' article, and the Harpers, the largest publishing house in America, perhaps in the world, re-published the book.

Its statements—with those of the 'Blackwood,' 'Pall Mall Gazette,' and other English periodicals—were being propagated through all the young reading and writing world of America. I was meeting them advertised in dailies, and made up into articles in magazines, and thus the generation of to-day, who had no means of judging Lady Byron but by these fables of her slanderers, were being foully deceived. The friends who knew her personally were a small select circle in England, whom death is every day reducing. They were few in number compared with the great world, and were *silent*. I saw these foul slanders crystallising into history uncontradicted by friends who knew her personally, who, firm in their own knowledge of her virtues and limited in view as aristocratic circles generally are, had no idea of the width of the world they were living in, and the exigency of the crisis. When time passed on and no voice was raised,

I spoke. I gave at first a simple story, for I knew instinctively that whoever put the first steel point of truth into this dark cloud of slander must wait for the storm to spend itself. I must say the storm exceeded my expectations, and has raged loud and long. But now that there is a comparative stillness I shall proceed, first, to prove what I have just been asserting, and, second, to add to my true story such facts and incidents as I did not think proper at first to state.

CHAPTER II. THE ATTACK ON LADY BYRON.

Table of Contents

In proving what I asserted in the first chapter, I make four points:

1st. A concerted attack upon Lady Byron’s reputation, begun by Lord Byron in self-defence.

2nd. That he transmitted his story to friends to be continued after his death.

3rd. That they did so continue it.

4th. That the accusations reached their climax over Lady Byron’s grave in ‘Blackwood’ of 1869, and the Guiccioli book, and that this re-opening of the controversy was my reason for speaking.

And first I shall adduce my proofs that Lady Byron’s reputation was, during the whole course of her husband’s life, the subject of a concentrated, artfully planned attack, commencing at the time of the separation and continuing during his life. By various documents carefully prepared, and used publicly or secretly as suited the case, he made converts of many honest men, some of whom were writers

and men of letters, who put their talents at his service during his lifetime in exciting sympathy for him, and who, by his own request, felt bound to continue their defence of him after he was dead.

In order to consider the force and significance of the documents I shall cite, we are to bring to our view just the issues Lord Byron had to meet, both at the time of the separation and for a long time after.

In Byron's 'Memoirs,' Vol. IV. Letter 350, under date December 10, 1819, nearly four years after the separation, he writes to Murray in a state of great excitement on account of an article in 'Blackwood,' in which his conduct towards his wife had been sternly and justly commented on, and which he supposed to have been written by Wilson, of the 'Noctes Ambrosianae.' He says in this letter: 'I like and admire W---n, and he should not have indulged himself in such outrageous license. . . . . When he talks of Lady Byron's business he talks of what he knows nothing about; and you may tell him *no man can desire a public investigation of that affair more than I do*.' {7}

He shortly after wrote and sent to Murray a pamphlet for publication, which was printed, but not generally circulated till some time afterwards. Though more than three years had elapsed since the separation, the current against him at this time was so strong in England that his friends thought it best, at first, to use this article of Lord Byron's discreetly with influential persons rather than to give it to the public.

The writer in 'Blackwood' and the indignation of the English public, of which that writer was the voice, were now particularly stirred up by the appearance of the first two

cantos of ‘Don Juan,’ in which the indecent caricature of Lady Byron was placed in vicinity with other indecencies, the publication of which was justly considered an insult to a Christian community.

It must here be mentioned, for the honour of Old England, that at first she did her duty quite respectably in regard to ‘Don Juan.’ One can still read, in Murray’s standard edition of the poems, how every respectable press thundered reprobations, which it would be well enough to print and circulate as tracts for our days.

Byron, it seems, had thought of returning to England, but he says, in the letter we have quoted, that he has changed his mind, and shall not go back, adding ‘I have finished the Third Canto of “Don Juan,” but the things I have heard and read discourage all future publication. You may try the copy question, but you’ll lose it; the cry is up, and the cant is up. I should have no objection to return the price of the copyright, and have written to Mr. Kinnaird on this subject.’

One sentence quoted by Lord Byron from the ‘Blackwood’ article will show the modern readers what the respectable world of that day were thinking and saying of him:—

> ‘It appears, in short, as if this miserable man, having exhausted every species of sensual gratification—having drained the cup of sin even to its bitterest dregs—were resolved to show us that he is no longer a human being even in his frailties, but a cool, unconcerned fiend, laughing with detestable glee over the whole of the better and worse elements of which human life is composed.’

The defence which Lord Byron makes, in his reply to that paper, is of a man cornered and fighting for his life. He speaks thus of the state of feeling at the time of his separation from his wife:—

> ‘I was accused of every monstrous vice by public rumour and private rancour; my name, which had been a knightly or a noble one since my fathers helped to conquer the kingdom for William the Norman, was tainted. I felt that, if what was whispered and muttered and murmured was true, I was unfit for England; if false, England was unfit for me. I withdrew; but this was not enough. In other countries—in Switzerland, in the shadow of the Alps, and by the blue depth of the lakes—I was pursued and breathed upon by the same blight. I crossed the mountains, but it was the same; so I went a little farther, and settled myself by the waves of the Adriatic, like the stag at bay, who betakes him to the waters.
>
> ‘If I may judge by the statements of the few friends who gathered round me, the outcry of the period to which I allude was beyond all precedent, all parallel, even in those cases where political motives have sharpened slander and doubled enmity. I was advised not to go to the theatres lest I should be hissed, nor to my duty in parliament lest I should be insulted by the way; even on the day of my departure my most intimate friend told me afterwards that he was under the apprehension of violence from the people who might be assembled at the door of the carriage.’

Now Lord Byron’s charge against his wife was that SHE was directly responsible for getting up and keeping up this persecution, which drove him from England,—that she did it in a deceitful, treacherous manner, which left him no chance of defending himself.

He charged against her that, taking advantage of a time when his affairs were in confusion, and an execution in the house, she left him suddenly, with treacherous professions of kindness, which were repeated by letters on the road, and that soon after her arrival at her home her parents sent him word that she would never return to him, and she confirmed the message; that when he asked the reason why, she refused to state any; and that when this step gave rise to a host of slanders against him she silently encouraged and confirmed the slanders. His claim was that he was denied from that time forth even the justice of any tangible accusation against himself which he might meet and refute.

He observes, in the same article from which we have quoted:—

> ‘When one tells me that I cannot “in any way justify my own behaviour in that affair,” I acquiesce, because no man can “justify” himself until he knows of what he is accused; and I have never had—and, God knows, my whole desire has ever been to obtain it—any specific charge, in a tangible shape, submitted to me by the adversary, nor by others, unless the atrocities of public rumour and the mysterious silence of the lady’s legal advisers may be deemed such.’

Lord Byron, his publishers, friends, and biographers, thus agree in representing his wife as the secret author and abettor of that persecution, which it is claimed broke up his life, and was the source of all his subsequent crimes and excesses.

Lord Byron wrote a poem in September 1816, in Switzerland, just after the separation, in which he stated, in so many words, these accusations against his wife. Shortly after the poet's death Murray published this poem, together with the 'Fare thee well,' and the lines to his sister, under the title of 'Domestic Pieces,' in his standard edition of Byron's poetry. It is to be remarked, then, that this was for some time a private document, shown to confidential friends, and made use of judiciously, as readers or listeners to his story were able to bear it. Lady Byron then had a strong party in England. Sir Samuel Romilly and Dr. Lushington were her counsel. Lady Byron's parents were living, and the appearance in the public prints of such a piece as this would have brought down an aggravated storm of public indignation.

For the general public such documents as the 'Fare thee well' were circulating in England, and he frankly confessed his wife's virtues and his own sins to Madame de Staël and others in Switzerland, declaring himself in the wrong, sensible of his errors, and longing to cast himself at the feet of that serene perfection,

'Which wanted one sweet weakness—to forgive.'

But a little later he drew for his private partisans this bitter poetical indictment against her, which, as we have

said, was used discreetly during his life, and published after his death.

Before we proceed to lay that poem before the reader we will refresh his memory with some particulars of the tragedy of Æschylus, which Lord Byron selected as the exact parallel and proper illustration of his wife's treatment of himself. In his letters and journals he often alludes to her as Clytemnestra, and the allusion has run the round of a thousand American papers lately, and been read by a thousand good honest people, who had no very clear idea who Clytemnestra was, and what she did which was like the proceedings of Lady Byron. According to the tragedy, Clytemnestra secretly hates her husband Agamemnon, whom she professes to love, and wishes to put him out of the way that she may marry her lover, Ægistheus. When her husband returns from the Trojan war she receives him with pretended kindness, and officiously offers to serve him at the bath. Inducing him to put on a garment, of which she had adroitly sewed up the sleeves and neck so as to hamper the use of his arms, she gives the signal to a concealed band of assassins, who rush upon him and stab him. Clytemnestra is represented by Æschylus as grimly triumphing in her success, which leaves her free to marry an adulterous paramour.

'I did it, too, in such a cunning wise,
That he could neither 'scape nor ward off doom.
I staked around his steps an endless net,
As for the fishes.'

In the piece entitled ‘Lines on hearing Lady Byron is ill,’ Lord Byron charges on his wife a similar treachery and cruelty. The whole poem is in Murray’s English edition, Vol. IV. p. 207. Of it we quote the following. The reader will bear in mind that it is addressed to Lady Byron on a sick-bed:—

‘I am too well avenged, but ’t was my right;
Whate’er my sins might be, thou wert not sent
To be the Nemesis that should requite,
Nor did Heaven choose so near an instrument.
Mercy is for the merciful! If thou
Hast been of such, ’t will be accorded now.
Thy nights are banished from the realms of sleep,
For thou art pillowed on a curse too deep;
Yes! they may flatter thee, but thou shalt feel
A hollow agony that will not heal.
Thou hast sown in my sorrow, and must reap
The bitter harvest in a woe as real.
I have had many foes, but none like thee;
For ’gainst the rest myself I could defend,
And be avenged, or turn them into friend;
But thou, in safe implacability,
Hast naught to dread,—in thy own weakness shielded,
And in my love, which hath but too much yielded,
And spared, for thy sake, some I should not spare.
And thus upon the world, trust in thy truth,
And the wild fame of my ungoverned youth,—
On things that were not and on things that are,—
Even upon such a basis thou halt built
A monument whose cement hath been guilt!
The moral Clytemnestra of thy lord,

And hewed down with an unsuspected sword
Fame, peace, and hope, and all that better life
Which, but for this cold treason of thy heart,
Might yet have risen from the grave of strife
And found a nobler duty than to part.
But of thy virtues thou didst make a vice,
Trafficking in them with a purpose cold,
And buying others' woes at any price,
For present anger and for future gold;
And thus, once entered into crooked ways,
The early truth, that was thy proper praise,
Did not still walk beside thee, but at times,
And with a breast unknowing its own crimes,
Deceits, averments incompatible,
Equivocations, and the thoughts that dwell
In Janus spirits, the significant eye
That learns to lie with silence, {14} the pretext
Of prudence with advantages annexed,
The acquiescence in all things that tend,
No matter how, to the desired end,—
All found a place in thy philosophy.
The means were worthy and the end is won.
I would not do to thee as thou hast done.'

Now, if this language means anything, it means, in plain terms, that, whereas, in her early days, Lady Byron was peculiarly characterised by truthfulness, she has in her recent dealings with him acted the part of a liar,—that she is not only a liar, but that she lies for cruel means and malignant purposes,—that she is a moral assassin, and her treatment of her husband has been like that of the most

detestable murderess and adulteress of ancient history, that she has learned to lie skilfully and artfully, that she equivocates, says incompatible things, and crosses her own tracks,—that she is double-faced, and has the art to lie even by silence, and that she has become wholly unscrupulous, and acquiesces in *any*thing, no matter what, that tends to the desired end, and that end the destruction of her husband. This is a brief summary of the story that Byron made it his life's business to spread through society, to propagate and make converts to during his life, and which has been in substance reasserted by 'Blackwood' in a recent article this year.

Now, the reader will please to notice that this poem is dated in September 1816, and that on the 29th of March of that same year, he had thought proper to tell quite another story. At that time the deed of separation was not signed, and negotiations between Lady Byron, acting by legal counsel, and himself were still pending. At that time, therefore, he was standing in a community who knew all he had said in former days of his wife's character, who were in an aroused and excited state by the fact that so lovely and good and patient a woman had actually been forced for some unexplained cause to leave him. His policy at that time was to make large general confessions of sin, and to praise and compliment her, with a view of enlisting sympathy. Everybody feels for a handsome sinner, weeping on his knees, asking pardon for his offences against his wife in the public newspapers.

The celebrated 'Fare thee well,' as we are told, was written on the 17th of March, and accidentally found its way

into the newspapers at this time ‘through the imprudence of a friend whom he allowed to take a copy.’ These ‘imprudent friends’ have all along been such a marvellous convenience to Lord Byron.

But the question met him on all sides, What is the matter? This wife you have declared the brightest, sweetest, most amiable of beings, and against whose behaviour as a wife you actually never had nor can have a complaint to make,—why is she *now* all of a sudden so inflexibly set against you?

This question required an answer, and he answered by writing another poem, which also *accidentally* found its way into the public prints. It is in his ‘Domestic Pieces,’ which the reader may refer to at the end of this volume, and is called ‘A Sketch.’

There was a most excellent, respectable, well-behaved Englishwoman, a Mrs. Clermont, {16} who had been Lady Byron’s governess in her youth, and was still, in mature life, revered as her confidential friend. It appears that this person had been with Lady Byron during a part of her married life, especially the bitter hours of her lonely child-bed, when a young wife so much needs a sympathetic friend. This Mrs. Clermont was the person selected by Lord Byron at this time to be the scapegoat to bear away the difficulties of the case into the wilderness.

We are informed in Moore’s Life what a noble pride of rank Lord Byron possessed, and how when the headmaster of a school, against whom he had a pique, invited him to dinner, he declined, saying, ‘To tell you the truth, Doctor, if you should come to Newstead, I shouldn’t think of inviting

you to dine with *me*, and so I don’t care to dine with you here.’ Different countries, it appears, have different standards as to good taste; Moore gives this as an amusing instance of a young lord’s spirit.

Accordingly, his first attack against this ‘lady,’ as we Americans should call her, consists in gross statements concerning her having been born poor and in an inferior rank. He begins by stating that she was

‘Born in the garret, in the kitchen bred,
Promoted thence to deck her mistress’ head;
Next—for some gracious service unexpressed
And from its wages only to be guessed—
Raised from the toilet to the table, where
Her wondering betters wait behind her chair.
With eye unmoved and forehead unabashed,
She dines from off the plate she lately washed:
Quick with the tale, and ready with the lie,
The genial confidante and general spy,—
Who could, ye gods! her next employment guess,—
An only infant’s earliest governess!
What had she made the pupil of her art
None knows; but that high soul secured the heart,
And panted for the truth it could not hear
With longing soul and undeluded ear!’ {17}

The poet here recognises as a singular trait in Lady Byron her peculiar love of truth,—a trait which must have struck everyone that had any knowledge of her through life. He goes on now to give what he certainly knew to be the real character of Lady Byron:—

‘Foiled was perversion by that youthful mind,
Which flattery fooled not, baseness could not blind,
Deceit infect not, nor contagion soil,
Indulgence weaken, or example spoil,
Nor mastered science tempt her to look down
On humbler talent with a pitying frown,
Nor genius swell, nor beauty render vain,
Nor envy ruffle to retaliate pain.’

We are now informed that Mrs. Clermont, whom he afterwards says in his letters was a spy of Lady Byron’s mother, set herself to make mischief between them. He says:—

‘If early habits,—those strong links that bind
At times the loftiest to the meanest mind,
Have given her power too deeply to instil
The angry essence of her deadly will;
If like a snake she steal within your walls,
Till the black slime betray her as she crawls;
If like a viper to the heart she wind,
And leaves the venom there she did not find,—
What marvel that this hag of hatred works
Eternal evil latent as she lurks.’

The noble lord then proceeds to abuse this woman of inferior rank in the language of the upper circles. He thus describes her person and manner:—

‘Skilled by a touch to deepen scandal’s tints
With all the kind mendacity of hints,
While mingling truth with falsehood, sneers with smiles,

A thread of candour with a web of wiles;
A plain blunt show of briefly-spoken seeming,
To hide her bloodless heart’s soul-harden’d scheming;
A lip of lies; a face formed to conceal,
And without feeling mock at all who feel;
With a vile mask the Gorgon would disown,—
A cheek of parchment and an eye of stone.
Mark how the channels of her yellow blood
Ooze to her skin and stagnate there to mud,
Cased like the centipede in saffron mail,
Or darker greenness of the scorpion’s scale,—
(For drawn from reptiles only may we trace
Congenial colours in that soul or face,)
Look on her features! and behold her mind
As in a mirror of itself defined:
Look on the picture! deem it not o’ercharged
There is no trait which might not be enlarged.’

The poem thus ends:—

‘May the strong curse of crushed affections light
Back on thy bosom with reflected blight,
And make thee in thy leprosy of mind
As loathsome to thyself as to mankind!
Till all thy self-thoughts curdle into hate,
Black—as thy will for others would create;
Till thy hard heart be calcined into dust,
And thy soul welter in its hideous crust.
O, may thy grave be sleepless as the bed,
The widowed couch of fire, that thou hast spread
Then when thou fain wouldst weary Heaven with prayer,

Look on thy earthly victims—and despair!
Down to the dust! and as thou rott’st away,
Even worms shall perish on thy poisonous clay.
But for the love I bore and still must bear
To her thy malice from all ties would tear,
Thy name,—thy human name,—to every eye
The climax of all scorn, should hang on high,
Exalted o’er thy less abhorred compeers,
And festering in the infamy of years.’
March 16, 1816.

Now, on the 29th of March 1816, this was Lord Byron’s story. He states that his wife had a truthfulness even from early girlhood that the most artful and unscrupulous governess could not pollute,—that she always *panted* for truth,—that flattery could not fool nor baseness blind her,—that though she was a genius and master of science, she was yet gentle and tolerant, and one whom no envy could ruffle to retaliate pain.

In September of the same year she is a monster of unscrupulous deceit and vindictive cruelty. Now, what had happened in the five months between the dates of these poems to produce such a change of opinion? Simply this:—

1st. The negotiation between him and his wife’s lawyers had ended in his signing a deed of separation in preference to standing a suit for divorce.

2nd. Madame de Staël, moved by his tears of anguish and professions of repentance, had offered to negotiate with Lady Byron on his behalf, and had failed.

The failure of this application is the only apology given by Moore and Murray for this poem, which gentle Thomas

Moore admits was not in quite as generous a strain as the ‘Fare thee well.’

But Lord Byron knew perfectly well, when he suffered that application to be made, that Lady Byron had been entirely convinced that her marriage relations with him could never be renewed, and that duty both to man and God required her to separate from him. The allowing the negotiation was, therefore, an artifice to place his wife before the public in the attitude of a hard-hearted, inflexible woman; her refusal was what he knew beforehand must inevitably be the result, and merely gave him capital in the sympathy of his friends, by which they should be brought to tolerate and accept the bitter accusations of this poem.

We have recently heard it asserted that this last-named piece of poetry was the sudden offspring of a fit of ill-temper, and was never intended to be published at all. There were certainly excellent reasons why his friends should have advised him not to publish it *at that time*. But that it was read with sympathy by the circle of his intimate friends, and believed by them, is evident from the frequency with which allusions to it occur in his confidential letters to them. {21}

About three months after, under date March 10, 1817, he writes to Moore: ‘I suppose now I shall never be able to shake off my sables in public imagination, more particularly since my moral ----- clove down my fame.’ Again to Murray in 1819, three years after, he says: ‘I never hear anything of Ada, the little Electra of Mycenae.’

Electra was the daughter of Clytemnestra, in the Greek poem, who lived to condemn her wicked mother, and to call

on her brother to avenge the father. There was in this mention of Electra more than meets the ear. Many passages in Lord Byron's poetry show that he intended to make this daughter a future partisan against her mother, and explain the awful words he is stated in Lady Anne Barnard's diary to have used when first he looked on his little girl,—'What an instrument of torture I have gained in you!'

In a letter to Lord Blessington, April 6, 1823, he says, speaking of Dr. Parr:— {22a}

> 'He did me the honour once to be a patron of mine, though a great friend of the other branch of the house of Atreus, and the Greek teacher, I believe, of my moral Clytemnestra. I say moral because it is true, and is so useful to the virtuous, that it enables them to do anything without the aid of an Ægistheus.'

If Lord Byron wrote this poem merely in a momentary fit of spleen, why were there so many persons evidently quite familiar with his allusions to it? and why was it preserved in Murray's hands? and why published after his death? That Byron was in the habit of reposing documents in the hands of Murray, to be used as occasion offered, is evident from a part of a note written by him to Murray respecting some verses so intrusted: 'Pray let not these *versiculi* go forth with my name except *to the initiated*.' {22b}

Murray, in publishing this attack on his wife after Lord Byron's death, showed that he believed in it, and, so believing, deemed Lady Byron a woman whose widowed state deserved neither sympathy nor delicacy of treatment. At a time when every sentiment in the heart of the most

deeply wronged woman would forbid her appearing to justify herself from such cruel slander of a dead husband, an honest, kind-hearted, worthy Englishman actually thought it right and proper to give these lines to her eyes and the eyes of all the reading world. Nothing can show more plainly what this poem was written for, and how thoroughly it did its work! Considering Byron as a wronged man, Murray thought he was contributing his mite towards doing him justice. His editor prefaced the whole set of ‘Domestic Pieces’ with the following statements:—

> ‘They all refer to the unhappy separation, of which the precise causes are still a mystery, and which he declared to the last were never disclosed to himself. He admitted that pecuniary embarrassments, disordered health, and dislike to family restraints had aggravated his naturally violent temper, and driven him to excesses. He suspected that his mother-in-law had fomented the discord,—which Lady Byron denies,—and that more was due to the malignant offices of a female dependant, who is the subject of the bitterly satirical sketch.
>
> * * * *
>
> ‘To these general statements can only be added the still vaguer allegations of Lady Byron, that she conceived his conduct to be the result of insanity,—that, the physician pronouncing him responsible for his actions, she could submit to them no longer, and that Dr. Lushington, her legal adviser, agreed that a reconciliation was neither proper nor possible. No weight can be attached to the opinions of an opposing

> counsel upon accusations made by one party behind the back of the other, who urgently demanded and was pertinaciously refused the least opportunity of denial or defence. He rejected the proposal for an amicable separation, but consented when threatened with a suit in Doctors' Commons.' {23}

Neither John Murray nor any of Byron's partisans seem to have pondered the admission in these last words.

Here, as appears, was a woman, driven to the last despair, standing with her child in her arms, asking from English laws protection for herself and child against her husband.

She had appealed to the first counsel in England, and was acting under their direction.

Two of the greatest lawyers in England have pronounced that there has been such a cause of offence on his part that a return to him is neither proper nor possible, and that no alternative remains to her but separation or divorce.

He asks her to state her charges against him. She, making answer under advice of her counsel, says, 'That if he *insists* on the specifications, he must receive them in open court in a suit for divorce.'

What, now, ought to have been the conduct of any brave, honest man, who believed that his wife was taking advantage of her reputation for virtue to turn every one against him, who saw that she had turned on her side even the lawyer he sought to retain on his; {24} that she was an unscrupulous woman, who acquiesced in every and any thing to gain her ends, while he stood before the public, as he says, 'accused of every monstrous vice, by public rumour

or private rancour'? When she, under advice of her lawyers, made the alternative legal *separation* or open investigation in court for divorce, what did he do?

HE SIGNED THE ACT OF SEPARATION AND LEFT ENGLAND.

Now, let any man who knows the legal mind of England, —let any lawyer who knows the character of Sir Samuel Romilly and Dr. Lushington, ask whether *they* were the men to take a case into court for a woman that had no *evidence* but her own statements and impressions? Were *they* men to go to trial without proofs? Did they not know that there were artful, hysterical women in the world, and would *they*, of all people, be the men to take a woman's story on her own side, and advise her in the last issue to bring it into open court, without legal proof of the strongest kind? Now, as long as Sir Samuel Romilly lived, this statement of Byron's— that he was condemned unheard, and had no chance of knowing whereof he *was accused—never appeared in public*.

It, however, was most actively circulated in *private*. That Byron was in the habit of intrusting to different confidants articles of various kinds to be shown to different circles as they could bear them, we have already shown. We have recently come upon another instance of this kind. In the late eagerness to exculpate Byron, a new document has turned up, of which Mr. Murray, it appears, had never heard when, after Byron's death, he published in the preface to his 'Domestic Pieces' the sentence: *'He rejected the proposal for an amicable separation, but consented when threatened with a suit in Doctors' Commons*.' It appears that, up to

1853, neither John Murray senior, nor the son who now fills his place, had taken any notice of this newly found document, which we are now informed was drawn up by Lord Byron in August 1817, while Mr. Hobhouse was staying with him at La Mira, near Venice, given to Mr. Matthew Gregory Lewis, *for circulation among friends in England*, found in Mr. Lewis's papers after his death, and *now* in the possession of Mr. Murray.' Here it is:—

> 'It has been intimated to me that the persons understood to be the legal advisers of Lady Byron have declared "their lips to be sealed up" on the cause of the separation between her and myself. If their lips are sealed up, they are not sealed up by me, and the greatest favour they can confer upon me will be to open them. From the first hour in which I was apprised of the intentions of the Noel family to the last communication between Lady Byron and myself in the character of wife and husband (a period of some months), I called repeatedly and in vain for a statement of their or her charges, and it was chiefly in consequence of Lady Byron's claiming (in a letter still existing) a promise on my part to consent to a separation, if such was really her wish, that I consented at all; this claim, and the exasperating and inexpiable manner in which their object was pursued, which rendered it next to an impossibility that two persons so divided could ever be reunited, induced me reluctantly then, and repentantly still, to sign the deed, which I shall be happy—most happy—to cancel, and go before any tribunal which may discuss the business in the most public manner.

‘Mr. Hobhouse made this proposition on my part, viz. to abrogate all prior intentions—and go into court—the very day before the separation was signed, and it was declined by the other party, as also the publication of the correspondence during the previous discussion. Those propositions I beg here to repeat, and to call upon her and hers to say their worst, pledging myself to meet their allegations,—whatever they may be,—and only too happy to be informed at last of their real nature.

‘BYRON.’

‘August 9, 1817.

‘P.S.—I have been, and am now, utterly ignorant of what description her allegations, charges, or whatever name they may have assumed, are; and am as little aware for what purpose they have been kept back,—unless it was to sanction the most infamous calumnies by silence.

‘BYRON.’

‘La Mira, near Venice.’

It appears the circulation of this document must have been *very private*, since Moore, not *over*-delicate towards Lady Byron, did not think fit to print it; since John Murray neglected it, and since it has come out at this late hour for the first time.

If Lord Byron really desired Lady Byron and her legal counsel to understand the facts herein stated, and was willing at all hazards to bring on an open examination, why was this *privately* circulated? Why not issued as a card in the London papers? Is it likely that Mr. Matthew Gregory Lewis, and a chosen band of friends acting as a committee,

requested an audience with Lady Byron, Sir Samuel Romilly, and Dr. Lushington, and formally presented this cartel of defiance?

We incline to think not. We incline to think that this small serpent, in company with many others of like kind, crawled secretly and privately around, and when it found a good chance, bit an honest Briton, whose blood was thenceforth poisoned by an undetected falsehood.

The reader now may turn to the letters that Mr. Moore has thought fit to give us of this stay at La Mira, beginning with Letter 286, dated July 1, 1817, {28a} where he says: 'I have been working up my impressions into a *Fourth* Canto of Childe Harold,' and also 'Mr. Lewis is in Venice. I am going up to stay a week with him there.'

Next, under date La Mira, Venice, July 10, {28b} he says, 'Monk Lewis is here; how pleasant!'

Next, under date July 20, 1817, to Mr. Murray: 'I write to give you notice that I have *completed the fourth and ultimate canto of Childe Harold*. . . . It is yet to be copied and polished, and the notes are to come.'

Under date of La Mira, August 7, 1817, he records that the new canto is one hundred and thirty stanzas in length, and talks about the price for it. He is now ready to launch it on the world; and, as now appears, on August 9, 1817, *two days after*, he wrote the document above cited, and put it into the hands of Mr. Lewis, as we are informed, 'for circulation among friends in England.'

The reason of this may now be evident. Having prepared a suitable number of those whom he calls in his notes to Murray 'the initiated,' by private documents and