

**CHILDE HAROLD'S
PILGRIMAGE:
A ROMAUNT**

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Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt by George Gordon Byron & William Spalding

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GEORGE GORDON BYRON & WILLIAM SPALDING

**CHILDE HAROLD'S
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PILGRIMAGE

A ROMAUNT
BY
LORD BYRON

WITH A MEMOIR
BY
WILLIAM SPALDING, A.M.

Professor of Logic and Rhetoric in the University of Saint Andrews

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MEMOIR.

BYRON, GEORGE GORDON, Lord, was the descendant, and became the head of an ancient and noble family. Commodore Byron, the celebrated voyager, was his grandfather; and his father, Captain Byron, a profligate and extravagant man, married Miss Gordon, an Aberdeenshire lady of old descent. The poet was born in London, on the 22d of January, 1788. Two years afterwards, his father having fled from his creditors to the Continent, where he soon died, Mrs. Byron Gordon sought at Aberdeen a residence suited to her scanty resources, which seem to have been in no way aided by the then Lord Byron, her husband's uncle, a retired and despondent man. In the course of the eight years spent in Scotland, she, a violent and misjudging woman, acted as if it had been her aim to weaken all the good tendencies in her son's fine nature, and to aggravate all the bad ones. Capricious alternations of severity and indulgence cherished his hereditary hastiness of temper, and pampered his proud wilfulness into selfish defiance; a constant change of teachers, and of methods of teaching, cherished habits of desultoriness and inattention in the boy's studies. Byron was already a spoiled child, when, about the commencement of his eleventh year, his granduncle's death made him the possessor of the family title and property.

His mother, left by the guardians to take her own way, now spoiled him more than ever; while at the same time she subjected him to fruitless and tormenting operations, designed to remove the lameness which, caused at his birth, she had taunted him with from childhood in her fits of anger. Improvement, both in temper and in industry, began on his being placed in an excellent private school at Dulwich; but the promising prospect was destroyed by his mother's constant interferences; and he remained at this place for no more than two years, and these broken by frequent and long visits to home. He was next removed to Harrow, where, though somewhat rebellious, and a very careless student of the Classics, he was liked as a generous and spirited youth, and went through a good deal of miscellaneous reading. During his school days at Harrow, and before he had entered his eighteenth year, he formed an attachment which, though doubtless poetized and magnified in his own imagination afterwards, was probably more genuine



and ardent than any he felt in mature life. The lady was Miss Chaworth, two years older than himself, the heiress of estates in the neighbourhood of his

patrimonial mansion of Newstead Abbey, in Nottinghamshire, and the near relative of a gentleman who had been killed in a duel by the preceding Lord Byron. He has immortalized her marriage and melancholy fate in "The Dream" and other poems.

Entered at Trinity College, Cambridge, in the autumn of 1805, he resided for two years. His career at the university was eccentric, profuse, and on the whole idle; but he read zealously when the humour seized him, acquiring a very considerable amount of stray knowledge; and a few persons of talent, with whom he had become intimate, were quite aware that he was a young man of no ordinary promise. While he was still at the university, he circulated privately copies of a thin volume of verses, which was prudently reserved for friendly readers, and soon suppressed. But before the end of 1807, and when in his twentieth year, he was rash enough to face the public with the *Hours of Idleness*, a collection of poems, from the very best of which no one would have ventured to pre-
sage the strength he was soon to exhibit. This strength was brought to a point by the anger which the young poet felt at the famous criticism on his book in the *Edinburgh Review*. Studying the satirical poets as models, and collecting every available piece of gossip that could point an ill-natured jest, he at length, in 1809, poured forth his wrath, all the warmer for the nursing he had given it, in his poetical satire "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." Scurrilously personal, and indiscriminately contemptuous of all the literary celebrities of the day, this poem showed powers which evidently wanted only maturity and fit guidance to achieve very great things.

In the same year he embarked with Mr. Hobhouse on a two years' journey on the Continent, in the course

of which he visited the Peninsula, extended his travels to Greece and Turkey, and, with his poetical enthusiasm now fairly awakened, composed in great part the first and second cantos of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage." The publication of these, in the spring of 1812, when he had just completed his twenty-fourth year, made him at once the most popular poet of the time. The few who had already learned to appreciate Wordsworth and Coleridge, found, in the new poet, a freedom both from the affectations of the one and from the obscurities and eccentricity of the other; while there were united with these a poetic elevation and richness not exceeded by either. The popularity, again, which Scott had won, by the "Lay," "Marmion," and the "Lady of the Lake," was already beginning to suffer from the satiety produced by bad imitations; and the Scottish minstrel's favour with the public waned rapidly, when Byron, deserting the meditative poetry of the "Pilgrimage," adopted, like Scott, the seductive form of the metrical romance, and gave it the charm of novelty by choosing Turkish and Grecian stories. In 1813 appeared his wildly striking fragment "The Giaour," and the more regular "Bride of Abydos." "The Corsair" and its sequel "Lara," followed in 1814, and were accompanied by the "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte." In the beginning of 1816, the first and most characteristic series of Lord Byron's works was closed by the appearance of "The Siege of Corinth" and "Parisina."

While he was thus building up his poetical fame, his domestic history underwent several changes, to which he was no way slow in inviting attention. "Childe Harold," the sated voluptuary, seeking to refresh his sick heart amidst the magnificence of nature, but contemplating all things through the medium of a cynical and despondent philosophy, had been avowedly presented as an idealized portrait of the young poet

himself, bitterly convinced, by a premature experience, of the hollowness of worldly pleasures, yet unable to discover any higher truths, in the contemplation and realization of which happiness might be attained. Till the publication of the earlier cantos of "Childe Harold," Byron's proud and sensitive spirit had been tempted to misanthropical discontent by the equivocal position he held in society, partly through accidental circumstances, partly through the reputation of his youthful irregularities. But the stamp thus imprinted on his earlier poetry was too much in accordance with his natural temperament to be easily effaced. The exaggerated and theatrical exhibition of his own character, in the persons of his heroes, was repeated even in those of his tales which were written while he was the idol of fashionable society, and enjoyed the prospect of domestic happiness; and when misfortune and opprobrium darkened round him, the petulant rashness of ill-trained youth passed into a permanent mood of morbid and haughty defiance, to which his later poems gave utterance with increasing eagerness and constancy. With as little power as any great poet ever possessed of observing or delineating the character and passions of other men, Byron was not true to nature, unless when he drew his materials from within; but his poetry, thus unreal and fantastic in all its representations of human life, has the singular charm which belongs to the self-drawn image of a nature nobly endowed with the poetic elements of greatness, and vacillating in its moral aspect between the extremes of goodness and of evil.

In the autumn of 1814, after having passed some years in that round of extravagant and unsatisfying dissipation into which he had been initiated even in boyhood, Lord Byron married the daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke. The marriage proved unhappy for