

**BYRON'S NARRATIVE OF THE LOSS OF THE
WAGER; WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE
GREAT DISTRESSES SUFFERED BY HIMSELF
AND HIS COMPANIONS ON THE COAST
OF PATAGONIA FROM THE YEAR 1740
TILL THEIR ARRIVAL IN ENGLAND 1746**

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JOHN BYRON

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ADVERTISEMENT.

AT a time when every thing connected with the name of Byron is regarded with such general interest, it is a subject of surprise and regret that no popular edition should exist of the Narrative of Commodore Byron. Indeed, to procure any copy at all of the work requires some research and trouble. To supply this deficiency is the object of the present publishers.

To the admirers of the illustrious Poet, the Narrative of the sufferings of his grandfather will, on more than one account, be acceptable. In the Poems, it is often, whether humorously or pathetically, alluded to; for instance, in the mournfully beautiful stanzas to his sister,

written soon after he left England for the last time, he says,

“ A strange doom is thy father’s son’s, and past
 Recalling, as it lies beyond redress ;
 Reversed for him *our grandsire’s fate* of yore,
 He had *no rest at sea*, nor I on shore !”

Again, in a different mood, in *Don Juan*, after having carried his hero through the horrors of a shipwreck, as disastrous and fatal in itself and its consequences as his imagination could conceive, he observes—

“ — for none
 Had suffered more—his hardships were comparative
 To those related in my grand-dad’s Narrative.”

To which passage he appends the following note :—“ Admiral Byron was remarkable for never making a voyage without a tempest. He was known to the sailors by the facetious name of ‘ foul-weather Jack.’” Indeed, to this narrative the poet is indebted for many of the incidents in that surpassing description of “ the dangers of the sea.” The awful “ whispering ”

in which, according to the Admiral, the men communicated their first horrid thoughts of putting one of their number to death for the support of the rest, is admirably preserved and amplified in Don Juan :

“ At length one whispered his companion, who
Whispered another, and thus it went round,
And then into a hoarser murmur grew,
An ominous and wild, and desperate sound,
And then his comrade’s thought each sufferer knew,
’Twas but his own, suppressed till now, he found :
And out they spoke of lots for flesh and blood,
And who should die to be his fellow’s food.”

The germ of the conception of the cave-scenes, so beautifully described in the poem, will also be found here ; the fondness of Juan for his favourite dog, the voracity with which he devoured the long-withheld food, and many other incidents, were suggested by this Narrative.*

* Captain Inglesfield’s account of the loss of the Centaur, (in September, 1782), furnished Byron with many of these trivial incidents, which, as the poet well knew, render a story, to use Gibbon’s words, “circumstantial and animated,” instead of “vague and languid;” the “eternal difference between fiction and truth.” The behaviour of

To those who would study the character of Lord Byron; discover what qualities of his nature were derived from his ancestors, and what were peculiarly his own; who would trace the effect produced on his writings by early tastes, habits, and associations, the narrative will afford ample material for observation.

Mr. Moore,—who, in paying to genius that tribute which genius alone can fully pay, has shewn how thoroughly he understood the character of the poet (a character, perhaps, after all to be *felt* rather than *explained*), how well he appreciated his virtues and the peculiar circumstances attendant on genius, which palliate, if they do not excuse, his foibles,—remarks, that Lord Byron “strikingly combined, in his own nature, some of the best and perhaps worst qualities that lie scattered through the various

the sailors before the sinking of the ship; some lashing themselves in their hammocks, some putting on their best clothes; the sail made of blankets; the ragged piece of sheet with which they caught the rain-water; the words used by the man who first saw the land, &c. &c., are all faithfully copied or slightly altered from Inglefield.

characters of his predecessors; the generosity, the love of enterprise, the high-mindedness of some of the better spirits of his race, with the irregular passions, the eccentricity, and daring recklessness of the world's opinion, that so much characterised others." In the character then of the most famous of those "better spirits," as exemplified in his own narrative of his sufferings and adventures, we may discern the source of many of the amiable qualities which descended to and adorned the immortal poet. We shall observe in both the same frankness, generosity, affability, love of excitement, the same mildness, and unassuming modesty. But the contrasts of their characters we shall find even more striking than the resemblances. We shall see in the sailor the ease and contentedness of spirit arising from its agreement with the sphere it moves in—the soul harmonizing with the situation—the man with the circumstances—the Supply equivalent to the Demand. We shall see in the poet the "high instincts of a creature moving about in worlds not realized"—the large expectancies, the high anticipations,

unfulfilled and unanswered ; the discontent, the jarring of a being not *at one* with the place of its existence, panting for something above it, aspiring "beyond the fitting medium of desire." We shall see him inordinately yearning after affection and happiness, yet enveloped, as it were, in a nervous network of sensibility, feelingly alive to every the faintest manifestation of slight, neglect, unkindness,—to all that causes sorrow and pain : we shall see the co-existence of these qualities producing necessarily disappointment and disgust ; the very capability of enjoying the good, unfitting him for the endurance of the ill ; the power of imagination heightening the beauties of the ideal, the keenness of perception aggravating the defects of the real ; the consequent struggles for existence in a wounded spirit between "feelings unemployed," affections unreturned, and the bitterness or apathy they engender—between original benevolence and acquired misanthropy. We shall see the sailor habitually yielding himself to the guidance and authority of others, unhesitatingly acknowledging, and, as a matter of course,