

**ECLECTIC ENGLISH
CLASSIC:
SELECTIONS FROM THE
POEMS OF LORD BYRON**

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Eclectic English Classic: Selections from the Poems of Lord Byron by George Gordon Byron & W. H. Venable

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GEORGE GORDON BYRON & W. H. VENABLE

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By...

ECLECTIC ENGLISH CLASSICS

SELECTIONS
FROM THE POEMS OF
LORD BYRON

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OF THE WALNUT HILLS HIGH SCHOOL, CINCINNATI



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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	7
LIST OF BYRON'S WORKS	14
CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF BYRON'S LIFE	15
THE PRISONER OF CHILLON	17
CHILDE HAROLD'S "GOOD NIGHT" TO HIS NATIVE LAND	33
CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE, CANTO THE THIRD	37
CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE, CANTO THE FOURTH	84
SONG OF THE GREEK BARD, FROM "DON JUAN"	154
DARKNESS	160
THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB	163
TO THOMAS MOORE	165
WHEN COLDNESS WRAPS THIS SUFFERING CLAY	167
ON THIS DAY I COMPLETE MY THIRTY-SIXTH YEAR	169

INTRODUCTION.

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON, born of unruly blood in a revolutionary age, was destined to lead revolutionary movements in both the political and the literary world. His ancestry, though noble, had in it a fierce, ungovernable strain. His adventurous grandfather, or, as Byron called him in verse, "granddad," was known to fame as "Foul-weather Jack;" his father, "a handsome rake," bore the nickname of "Mad Jack;" and the poet's uncle, who in a fit of rage killed a neighbor, was distinguished as the "Wicked Byron." Lord Byron's mother was vain, violent, passionate, yet fond,—an hysterical woman whose character was a mixture of strength and weakness. She was of Scotch birth, with some blood royal of the Stuart family in her proud veins. Her maiden name was Gordon.

"Mad Jack" Byron deserted his wife soon after the birth of their only child, George, who first saw the light in 1788, in the city of London. The abandoned mother removed with her child to Aberdeen, Scotland, where they resided about ten years, until, by the death of the "Wicked Byron," the boy inherited the title of baron and the large estates and feudal hall of Newstead Abbey.

Though "Geordie" was sent to school irregularly, at Aberdeen

and elsewhere, his education was really neglected, and he learned neither to study nor to obey, but grew up a typical spoiled child. He did, indeed, get some lessons from the lofty mountain, "dark Lochnagar." On becoming a young lord, he was put under the care of a guardian, Lord Carlisle, who placed him in the public school of Harrow. The head master of this celebrated boys' school soon discovered in the thirteen-year-old lad "a wild mountain colt; but *there was mind in his eye.*" The energy of Byron's mind in his school and college days was given more to general reading than to systematic study. It is recorded that he was a poor penman and disliked mathematics, but acquired a fair knowledge of the classics, some French, and much Italian. His mastery of bodily accomplishments was admirable, considering the disadvantage he suffered from a deformity in his right foot, causing a slight lameness. Notwithstanding this defect, Byron was a skillful athlete,—could ride, row, swim, box, fence, and shoot better than most of his comrades. He shrank from the sports of the chase, not from timidity,—for his pets were dogs, bears, and wolves,—but because he hated all forms of cruelty. He was not a bully, neither would he be imposed upon, and he never could understand the submissive spirit. With true Scotch-English pluck, he fought his way from misery to victory, and this explains his saying: "I hated Harrow till the last year and a half, but then I liked it."

From Harrow he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, against his wish, for he wanted to go to Oxford. He was now a youth of seventeen, and his turbulent soul began to seek vent for its emotions in verse. A poet born, he wrote easily, naturally; and the book he published in his nineteenth year, prettily called "Hours of Idleness," had in it as much thought and sentiment

as the author had thus far experienced in real life. He took his degree in 1808, and went to London.

His first poems were written for pleasure and from the stirrings of boyish ambition to win a name. His second venture had a very different motive and temper. The "Hours of Idleness" was severely criticised in the "Edinburgh Review," and Byron struck back fiercely in a satire called "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," beginning with the audacious lines:

"Prepare for rime: I'll publish, right or wrong;
Fools are my theme, let satire be my song."

The author afterwards saw that there was much more wrong than right in this literary challenge.

The year after he left college, Byron made his first tour of the Continent, traveling two years in Spain, Albania, and Greece. On his return to England early in 1812, he published the first two cantos of "Childe Harold," a poem that was immediately recognized, even by his enemies, as a work of genius, though the poet himself was not aware of its excellence. Surprised at his own success, he wrote: "I awoke one morning and found myself famous." His poetry stirred the heart of Europe. It thrilled London like an electric shock. Byron, upon whom the Muse had bestowed a new lordship, was idolized by society. About four years of his life were spent in London and at Newstead Abbey, devoted to the excitements of fashionable life, the dissipations of pleasure, and the solace of literary composition. It was in this period of conventional distinction that he wooed and won Miss Milbanke, who became Lady Byron in January, 1815.

The marriage, being one of convenience, not of love on either side, proved unhappy. Byron had many love affairs, none of

them fortunate. It is truly said by one of his biographers, "He was the slave and the despot of women, their adorer and their contemner." Only a year elapsed from the time she became his wife until Lady Byron left her husband, taking with her their infant daughter. Byron said the causes of the separation were too simple to be explained, and they have never been explained to the satisfaction of the world.

Byron was violently blamed in England, not only for his treatment of his wife, but for general dissolute conduct and for the audacity of his sentiments. Such was the revulsion of public feeling, so vehement was the outcry against him, that, as he afterwards wrote, he felt that if what was said were true he was unfit for England; if false, England was unfit for him. Under the circumstances his pride dictated but one course: on the 25th of April, 1816, he quitted England, never to return. Only four years of his mature life had been passed in his native land. He was but twenty-eight years old when he set out on his second and final visit to southern Europe.

He went in a rage against mankind. Now he had knowledge of life, good and bad, and now there was something real of which to write. He traveled in Switzerland and Italy, seeing all things vividly, thinking intensely, feeling profoundly, and pouring out his whole mind in eloquent verse. Never poet wrote more rapidly. By far the best of his poems were produced in Italy. At length, after six or seven years of varied experience, not free from licentiousness, he seemed to tire of himself, to weary of sensual delights, and even to lose interest in the poetic art.

Political questions called his energies away from poetry to war. An ardent lover of liberty, he wished to promote the actual freedom of oppressed nations. Not content to sing the imaginary