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BYRON'S
PRISONER OF CHILLON

AND PART OF
MAZEPPA

WITH LIFE AND NOTES



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LIFE OF BYRON.

GEORGE GORDON, Lord Byron, a great English poet, was born in Holles Street, London, on the 22d of January 1788. He was the only son of Captain John Byron of the Guards, and Catherine Gordon of Gight, an heiress in Aberdeenshire. Captain Byron and his wife did not live happily together, and, a separation taking place, the lady retired to the city of Aberdeen with her little lame boy, whom she passionately loved, her sole income at this time being about £130 per annum. In his eleventh year, Byron succeeded his grand-uncle, William, Lord Byron; and mother and son immediately left the north for Newstead Abbey, the ancient seat of the family, situated a few miles distant from Nottingham. On succeeding to the title, Byron was placed in a private school at Dulwich, and thereafter sent to Harrow. In 1805, he removed to Trinity College, Cambridge; and two years thereafter his first volume of verse, entitled *Hours of Idleness*, was printed at Newark. The volume was fiercely assailed by Lord (then Mr) Brougham in the *Edinburgh Review*, and his sarcasms stung Byron into a poet. The satire, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, was written in reply to the article in the *Edinburgh*, and the town was taken by a play of wit and a mastery of versification unequalled since the days of Pope. In the chorus of praise that immediately arose, Byron withdrew from England, visited the shores of the Mediterranean, and sojourned in Turkey and Greece. On his return in 1812, he published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*, with immense success, and was at once enrolled among the great poets of his country. During the next two years, he produced *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, and *Lara*. While these brilliant pieces were flowing from his pen, he was indulging in all the revelries and excesses of the metropolis. What was noblest in the man revolted at this mode of life, and in an effort to escape from it, he married Miss Milbanke, daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke, a baronet in the county of Durham. This union proved singularly infelicitous. It lasted only a year, and during

that brief period, money embarrassments, recriminations, and all the miseries incident to an ill-assorted marriage, were of frequent occurrence. After the birth of her child Ada, Lady Byron retired to her father's house, and refused to return. This event, from the celebrity of one of the parties, caused considerable excitement in the fashionable world. Byron became the subject of all uncharitable tongues. The most popular poet, he was, for a space, the most unpopular man in the country. The separation from his wife, and the ensuing departure from England (April 25, 1816), mark a stage in Byron's genius.

Misery and indignation stimulated him to remarkable activity. Six months' stay at Geneva produced the third canto of *Childe Harold* and *The Prisoner of Chillon*. *Manfred* and *The Lament of Tasso* were written in 1817. The next year, he was at Venice, and finished *Childe Harold* there; and, in the gay and witty *Beppo*, made an experiment in the new field which he was afterwards to work so successfully. During the next three years, he produced the first five cantos of *Don Juan*, and a number of dramas of various merit, *Cain* and *Werner* being opposite poles. In 1822, he removed to Pisa, and worked there at *Don Juan*, which poem, with the exception of *The Vision of Judgment*, occupied his pen almost up to the close of his life. In the summer of 1823, he sailed for Greece, to aid the struggle for independence with his influence and money. He arrived at Missolonghi on the 4th of January 1824. There he found nothing but confusion and contending chiefs; but in three months, he succeeded in evoking some kind of order from the turbulent patriotic chaos. His health, however, began to fail. On the 9th April, he was overtaken by a shower while on horseback, and an attack of fever and rheumatism followed, which ended in his death on 19th April 1824. His body was conveyed to England; and, denied a resting-place in Westminster Abbey, it rests in the family vault in the village church of Hucknall, near Newstead.

The resources of Byron's intellect were amazing. He gained his first reputation as a depicor of the gloomy and stormful passions. After he wrote *Beppo*, he was surprised to find that he was a humorist; when he reached Greece, he discovered an ability for military organisation. His real strength lay in wit, and the direct representation of human life. No man had a clearer eye for fact and reality. His eloquence, pathos, and despair are only phases of his mind. In his later writings, there is a wonderful fund of wit, sarcasm, humour, and knowledge of men.

THE
PRISONER OF CHILLON.

, The asterisks refer to notes at the end on the words or lines to which they are affixed.

SONNET ON CHILLON.

Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind !
Brightest in dungeons, Liberty, thou art !
For there thy habitation is the heart—
The heart which love of thee alone can bind ;
And when thy sons to fetters are consigned—
To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom—
Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.
Chillon ! thy prison is a holy place,
And thy sad floor an altar ; for 'twas trod,
Until his very steps have left a trace
Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a sod,
By Bonnivard ! May none those marks efface !
For they appeal from tyranny to God.

I.

My hair* is gray, but not with years ;
Nor grew it white
In a single night,
As men's have grown from sudden fears.*
My limbs are bowed, though not with toil, 5
But rusted with a vile repose,
For they have been a dungeon's spoil,
And mine has been the fate of those

To whom the goodly earth and air
 Are banned, and barred—forbidden fare ; 10
 But this was for my father's faith
 I suffered chains and courted death : *
 That father perished at the stake
 For tenets he would not forsake ;
 And for the same his lineal race 15
 In darkness found a dwelling-place. ✓
 We were seven—who now are one,
 Six in youth, and one in age,*
 Finished as they had begun,
 Proud of Persecution's rage : 20
 One in fire, and two in field,
 Their belief with blood have sealed,
 Dying as their father died,
 For the God their foes denied ;
 Three were in a dungeon cast, 25
 Of whom this wreck is left the last.

II.

There are seven pillars of Gothic mould,*
 In Chillon's* dungeons deep and old ;
 There are seven columns, massy and gray,
 Dim with a dull imprisoned ray 30
 A sunbeam which hath lost its way, ✓
 And through the crevice and the cleft*
 Of the thick wall is fallen and left ;
 Creeping o'er the floor so damp,
 Like a marsh's meteor lamp : * 35
 And in each pillar there is a ring,
 And in each ring there is a chain ;
 That iron is a cankering thing,
 For in these limbs its teeth remain,
 With marks that will not wear away, 40
 Till I have done with this new day,
 Which now is painful to these eyes,
 Which have not seen the sun so rise

For years—I cannot count them o'er !
 I lost their long and heavy score 45
 When my last brother drooped and died,
 And I lay living by his side. ✓

III.

They chained us each to a column stone,
 And we were three—yet each alone ;
 We could not move a single pace, 50
 We could not see each other's face,
 But with that pale and livid light
 That made us strangers in our sight :
 And thus together, yet apart,
 Fettered in hand, but joined in heart, 55
 'Twas still some solace in the dearth
 Of the pure elements of earth,
 To hearken to each other's speech,
 And each turn comforter to each
 With some new hope, or legend old, 60
 Or song heroically bold ;
 But even these at length grew cold. ✓
 Our voices took a dreary tone,
 An echo of the dungeon-stone,
 A grating sound—not full and free* 65
 As they of yore were wont to be :
 It might be fancy—but to me
 They never sounded like our own.

IV.

I was the eldest of the three ;
 And to uphold and cheer the rest 70
 I ought to do*—and did—my best,
 And each did well in his degree.
 The youngest,* whom my father loved,
 Because our mother's brow was given
 To him—with eyes as blue as heaven— 75
 For him my soul was sorely moved.

And truly might it be distressed
 To see such bird in such a nest ;
 For he was beautiful as day—
 (When day was beautiful to me .80
 As to young eagles, being free)— ✓
 A polar day* which will not see
 A sunset till its summer 's gone,
 Its sleepless summer of long light,
 The snow-clad offspring of the sun : 85
 And thus he was as pure and bright,
 And in his natural spirit gay,
 With tears for nought but others' ills,
 And then they flowed like mountain rills,
 Unless he could assuage the woe 90
 Which he abhorred to view below.*

V.

The other was as pure of mind,
 But formed to combat with his kind ;
 Strong in his frame, and of a mood
 Which 'gainst the world in war had* stood, 95
 And perished in the foremost rank
 With joy—but not in chains to pine :*
 His spirit withered with their clank,
 I saw it silently decline—
 And so perchance in sooth did mine ; ✓ 100
 But yet I forced it* on to cheer
 Those relics of a home so dear.
 He was a hunter of the hills,
 Had followed there the deer and wolf ;
 To him this dungeon was a gulf, 105
 And fettered feet the worst of ills.

VI.

Lake Lemman* lies by Chillon's walls :
 A thousand feet in depth below
 Its massy waters meet and flow ;

Thus much the fathom-line was sent 110
 From Chillon's snow-white battlement,
 Which round about the wave enthralls :
 A double dungeon wall and wave
 Have made—and like a living grave.
 Below the surface of the lake 115
 The dark vault lies wherein we lay,
 We heard it ripple night and day :
 Sounding o'er our heads it knocked ; ✓
 And I have felt the winter's spray
 Wash through the bars when winds were high
 And wanton in the happy sky ; 121
 And then the very rock hath rocked,
 And I have felt it shake, unshocked,
 Because I could have smiled to see
 The death that would have set me free. 125

VII.

I said my nearer brother pined,
 I said his mighty heart declined,
 He loathed and put away his food :
 It was not that * 'twas coarse and rude,
 For we were used to hunters' fare, 130
 And for the like had little care :
 The milk drawn from the mountain goat
 Was changed for water from the meat ; ✓
 Our bread was such as captives' tears
 Have moistened many a thousand years, 135
 Since man first pent his fellow-men
 Like brutes within an iron den :
 But what were these to us or him ?
 These wasted not his heart or limb :
 My brother's soul was of that mould 140
 Which in a palace had * grown cold,
 Had his free breathing * been denied
 The range of the steep mountain's side,
 But why delay the truth ?—he died.

I saw, and could not hold his head, 145
 Nor reach his dying hand—nor dead—
 Though hard I strove, but strove in vain,
 To rend and gnash my bonds in twain. ✓
 He died ; and they unlocked his chain,
 And scooped for him a shallow grave 150
 Even from the cold earth of our cave.
 I begged them, as a boon, to lay
 His corse in dust whereon the day
 Might shine ; it was a foolish thought,
 But then within my brain it wrought,* 155
 That even in death his free-born breast
 In such a dungeon could not rest.
 I might have spared my idle prayer :
 They coldly laughed—and laid him there :
 The flat and turfless earth above* 160
 The being we so much did love ;
 His empty chain above it leant—
 Such murder's fitting monument ! ✓

VIII.

But he, the favourite and the flower,
 Most cherished since his natal hour, 165
 His mother's image in fair face,
 The infant love of all his race,
 His martyred father's dearest thought,
 My latest care, for whom I sought
 To hoard my life, that his might be 170
 Less wretched now, and one day free :
 He, too, who yet had held untired
 A spirit natural or inspired—
 He, too, was struck, and day by day
 Was withered on the stock away. 175
 O God! it is a fearful thing
 To see the human soul take wing
 In any shape, in any mood : ✓
 I've seen it rushing forth in blood,

I've seen it on the breaking ocean 180
 Strive with a swollen convulsive motion,
 I've seen the sick and ghastly bed
 Of Sin* delirious with its dread :
 But these were horrors—this was woe
 Unmixed with such—but sure and slow. 185
 He faded, and so calm and meek,
 So softly worn, so sweetly weak,
 So tearless, yet so tender—kind,
 And grieved for those he left behind ;
 With all the while a cheek whose bloom 190
 Was as a mockery of the tomb,
 Whose tints as gently sunk away
 As a departing rainbow's ray ; ✓
 An eye* of most transparent light,
 That almost made the dungeon bright, 195
 And not a word of murmur—not
 A groan o'er his untimely lot—
 A little talk of better days,
 A little hope my own to raise,
 For I was sunk in silence—lost 200
 In this last loss, of all the most ;
 And then the sighs he would suppress
 Of fainting nature's feebleness,
 More slowly drawn, grew less and less :
 I listened, but I could not hear ; 205
 I called, for I was wild with fear :
 I knew 'twas hopeless, but my dread
 Would not be thus admonished. ✓
 I called, and thought I heard a sound—
 I burst my chain with one strong bound, 210
 And rushed to him—I found him not ;
 I only stirred in this black spot,
 I only lived—I only drew
 The accursed breath of dungeon-dew ;
 The last—the soul—the dearest link 215
 Between me and the eternal brink,

Which bound me to my failing race,
 Was broken in this fatal place.
 One on the earth, and one beneath—
 My brothers—both had ceased to breathe : 220
 I took that hand which lay so still ;
 Alas, my own was full as chill ; ✓
 I had not strength to stir, or strive,
 But felt that I was still alive—
 A frantic feeling, when we know 225
 That what we love shall ne'er be so.
 I know not why
 I could not die ;
 I had no earthly hope—but faith,
 And that forbade a selfish death. 230

IX.

What next befell me then and there
 I know not well—I never knew—
 First came the loss of light, and air,
 And then of darkness too.
 I had no thought, no feeling—none ; 235
 Among the stones I stood a stone,
 And was, scarce conscious what I wist,
 As shrubless crags within the mist ; ✓
 For all was blank, and bleak, and gray,
 It was not night—it was not day ; 240
 It was not even the dungeon-light,
 So hateful to my heavy sight,
 But vacancy absorbing space,
 And fixedness—without a place :
 There were no stars—no earth—no time, 245
 No check—no change—no good—no crime,
 But silence, and a stirless breath
 Which neither was of life nor death ;
 A sea of stagnant idleness,
 Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless ! 250

X.

- A light broke in upon my brain —
 It was the carol of a bird ;
 It ceased, and then it came again,
 The sweetest song ear ever heard ;
 And mine was thankful, till my eyes 255
 Rau over with the glad surprise,
 And they that moment could not see
 I was the mate of misery.* †
 But then by dull degrees came back
 My senses to their wonted track : 260
 I saw the dungeon walls and floor
 Close slowly round me as before ;
 I saw the glimmer of the sun
 Creeping as it before had done,
 But through the crevice where it came 265
 That bird was perched, as fond and tame,
 And tamer than upon the tree ;
 A lovely bird, with azure wings,
 And song that said a thousand things,
 And seemed to say them all for me ! 270
 I never saw its like before,
 I ne'er shall see its likeness more :
 It seemed, like me, to want a mate,
 But was not half so desolate ; ✓
 And it was come to love me when 275
 None lived to love me so again,
 And cheering from my dungeon's brink,
 Had brought me back to feel and think.
 I know not if it late were free,*
 Or broke its cage to perch on mine ; 280
 But knowing well captivity,
 Sweet bird, I could not wish for thine !
 Or if it were, in wingèd guise,
 A visitant from Paradise ;
 For—Heaven forgive that thought ! the while
 Which made me both to weep and smile—* 286

I sometimes deemed that it might be
 My brother's soul come down to me ;
 But then at last away it flew,
 And then 'twas mortal—well I knew, 290
 For he would never thus have flown,
 And left me twice so doubly lone—
 Lone—as the corpse within its shroud ;
 Lone—as a solitary cloud—

A single cloud on a sunny day, 295
 While all the rest of heaven is clear,
 A frown upon the atmosphere,
 That hath no business to appear
 When skies are blue and earth is gay.

XI.

A kind of change came in my fate, 300
 My keepers grew compassionate :
 I know not what had made them so,
 They were inured to sights of woe ;
 But so it was : my broken chain
 With links unfastened did remain, 305
 And it was liberty to stride*
 Along my cell from side to side,
 And up and down, and then athwart, ✓
 And tread it over every part,
 And round the pillars one by one, 310
 Returning where my walk begun ;*
 Avoiding only, as I trod,
 My brothers' graves without a sod ;
 For if I thought with heedless tread
 My step profaned their lowly bed, 315
 My breath came gaspingly and thick,
 And my crushed heart fell blind and sick.

XII.

I made a footing in the wall,
 It was not therefrom to escape,

For I had buried one and all, 320
 Who loved me in a human shape ;
 And the whole earth would henceforth be
 A wider prison unto me :
 No child—no sire—no kin had I,
 No partner in my misery. ✓ 325
 I thought of this, and I was glad,
 For thought of them had made me mad :
 But I was curious to ascend
 To my barred windows, and to bend
 Once more, upon the mountains high, 330
 The quiet of a loving eye.

XIII.

I saw them—and they were the same,
 They were not changed like me in frame ;
 I saw their thousand years of snow
 On high—their wide long lake below, 335
 And the blue Rhone* in fullest flow ;
 I heard the torrents leap and gush
 O'er channelled rock and broken bush ;
 I saw the white-walled distant town,*
 And whiter sails go skimming down ; 340
 And then there was a little isle,*
 Which in my very face did smile,
 The only one in view ; ✓
 A small green isle, it seemed no more,
 Scarce broader than my dungeon floor ; 345
 But in it there were three tall trees,
 And o'er it blew the mountain breeze,
 And by it there were waters flowing,
 And on it there were young flowers growing,
 Of gentle breath and hue. 350
 The fish swam by the castle wall,
 And they seemed joyous each and all ;
 The eagle rode the rising blast,
 Methought he never flew so fast

As then to me he seemed to fly ; 355
 And then new tears came in my eye,
 And I felt troubled—and would fain
 I had not left my recent chain.*
 And when I did descend again,
 The darkness of my dim abode 360
 Fell on me as a heavy load ; ✓
 It was as is a new-dug grave,
 Closing o'er one we sought to save ;
 And yet my glance, too much oppressed,
 Had almost need of such a rest. 365

XIV.

It might be months, or years, or days,
 I kept no count—I took no note,
 I had no hope my eyes to raise,
 And clear them of their dreary mote ;
 At last men came to set me free, 370
 I asked not why, and recked not where,
 It was at length the same to me,
 Fettered or fetterless to be,
 I learned to love despair.
 And thus, when they appeared at last, 375
 And all my bonds aside were cast,
 These heavy walls to me had grown
 A hermitage—and all my own ! ✓
 And half I felt as* they were come
 To tear me from a second home : 380
 With spiders I had friendship made,
 And watched them in their sullen trade,
 Had seen the mice by moonlight play,
 And why should I feel less than they ?
 We were all inmates of one place, 385
 And I, the monarch of each race,
 Had power to kill—yet, strange to tell !
 In quiet we had learned to dwell ;

My very chains and I grew friends,
 So much a long communion tends 390
 To make us what we are: even I
 Regained my freedom with a sigh. ✓

MAZEPPA.

“Bring forth the horse!” The horse was brought;
 In truth, he was a noble steed,
 A Tartar* of the Ukraine* breed,
 Who looked as though the speed of thought
 Were in his limbs; but he was wild, 5
 Wild as the wild deer, and untaught,
 With spur and bridle undefiled—
 ’Twas but a day he had been caught;*
 And snorting, with erected mane,
 And struggling fiercely, but in vain, 10
 In the full foam of wrath and dread
 To me the desert-born was led:
 They bound me on, that menial throng,*
 Upon his back with many a thong,
 Then loosed him with a sudden lash— 15
 Away!—away!—and on we dash!—
 Torrents less rapid and less rash.*
 ‘Away! away! my breath was gone,
 I saw not where he hurried on:
 ’Twas scarcely yet the break of day, 20
 And on he foamed—away!—away!—
 The last of human sounds which rose,
 As I was darted from my foes,
 Was the wild shout of savage laughter,
 Which on the wind came roaring after 25

Town—village—none were on our track,
 But a wild plain of far extent,
 And bounded by a forest black.
 The sky was dull, and dim, and gray, 65
 And a low breeze crept moaning by—
 I could have answered with a sigh—
 But fast we fled, away, away—
 And I could neither sigh nor pray ;
 And my cold sweat-drops fell like rain 70
 Upon the courser's bristling mane ;
 But, snorting still with rage and fear,
 He flew upon his far career ;
 At times I almost thought, indeed,
 He must have slackened in his speed : 75
 But no—my bound and slender frame
 Was nothing to his angry might,
 And merely like a spur became ;
 Each motion which I made to free
 My swollen limbs from their agony 80
 Increased his fury and affright ;
 I tried my voice—'twas faint and low,
 But yet he swerved as from a blow ;
 And, starting to each accent, sprang
 As from a sudden trumpet's clang ; 85
 Meantime my cords were wet with gore,
 Which, oozing through my limbs, ran o'er ;
 And in my tongue the thirst became
 A something fierier far than flame.
 'We neared the wild wood—'twas so wide, 90
 I saw no bounds on either side ; *
 'Twas studded with old sturdy trees,
 That bent not to the roughest breeze
 Which howls down from Siberia's waste,
 And strips the forest in its haste ; 95
 But these were few and far between.*
 Set thick with shrubs more young and green,

'Twas a wild waste of underwood,
 And here and there a chestnut stood,
 The strong oak, and the hardy pine ; 100
 But far apart—and well it were,*
 Or else a different lot were* mine—
 The boughs gave way, and did not tear
 My limbs ; and I found strength to bear
 My wounds, already scarred* with cold— 105
 My bonds forbade to loose my hold.
 We rustled through the leaves like wind,
 Left shrubs, and trees, and wolves behind ;
 By night I heard them on the track,
 Their troop came hard upon our back, 110
 With their long gallop, which can tire
 The hound's deep hate and hunter's fire :
 Where'er we flew they followed on,
 Nor left us with the morning sun ;
 Behind I saw them, scarce a rood,* 115
 At daybreak winding through the wood,
 And through the night had heard their feet
 Their stealing, rustling step repeat.
 Oh ! how I wished for spear or sword,
 At least to die amidst the horde, 120
 And perish—if it must be so—
 At bay, destroying many a foe.
 When first my courser's race begun,
 I wished the goal already won ;
 But now I doubted strength and speed. 125
 Vain doubt ! his swift and savage breed
 Had nerved him like the mountain roe ;
 Nor faster falls the blinding snow
 Which whelms the peasant near the door
 Whose threshold he shall cross no more, 130
 Bewildered with the dazzling blast,
 Than through the forest-paths he passed.

* The wood was passed ; 'twas more than noon,
 But chill the air, although in June ;

- Or it might be my veins ran cold— 135
 Prolonged endurance tames the bold ;
 What marvel if this worn-out trunk
 Beneath its woes a moment sunk ?
 The earth gave way, the skies rolled round,
 I seemed to sink upon the ground ; 140
 But erred, for I was fastly bound.
 My heart turned sick, my brain grew sore,
 And throbbed awhile, then beat no more :
 The skies spun like a mighty wheel ;
 I saw the trees like drunkards reel, 145
 And a slight flash sprang o'er my eyes,
 Which saw no further : he who dies
 Can die no more than then I died.
 O'ertortured by that ghastly ride,
 I felt the blackness come and go, 150
 And strove to wake ; but could not make
 My senses climb up from below.
- ' My thoughts came back ; where was I ? cold,
 And numb, and gidly : pulse by pulse
 Life reassumed its lingering hold, 155
 And throb by throb—till grown a pang *
 Which for a moment could convulse,
 My blood reflowed, though thick and chill ;
 My ear with uncouth noises rang,
 My heart began once more to thrill ; 160
 My sight returned, though dim, alas !
 And thickened, as it were, with glass.
 Methought the dash of waves was nigh ;
 There was a gleam, too, of the sky
 Studded with stars—it is no dream ; 165
 The wild horse swims the wilder stream !
 The bright, broad river's gushing tide
 Sweeps, winding onward, far and wide,
 And we are half-way, struggling o'er
 To yon unknown and silent shore. 170

- The waters broke my hollow trance,
 And with a temporary strength
 My stiffened limbs were rebaptised,
 My courser's broad breast proudly braves,
 And dashes off the ascending waves, 175
 And onward we advance !
 We reach the slippery shore at length,
 A haven I but little prized.
- ' With glossy skin, and dripping mane,
 And reeling limbs, and reeking flank, 180
 The wild steed's sinewy nerves still strain
 Up the repelling bank.
 We gain the top ; a boundless plain
 Spreads through the shadow of the night,
 And onward, onward, onward, seems, 185
 Like precipices in our dreams,
 To stretch beyond the sight.
- ' Onward we went, but slack and slow ;
 His savage force at length o'erspent,*
 The drooping courser, faint and low, 190
 All feebly foaming went.
 A sickly infant had had* power
 To guide him forward in that hour ;
 But useless all to me :*
 His new-born tameness nought availed— 195
 My limbs were bound ; my force had* failed,
 Perchance, had* they been free.
 With feeble effort still I tried
 To rend the bonds so starkly* tied,
 But still it was in vain ; 200
 My limbs were only wrung the more,
 And soon the idle strife gave o'er,
 Which but prolonged their pain :
 At length, while reeling on our way,
 Methought* I heard a courser neigh, 205

From out yon tuft of blackening fir,
 Is it the wind those branches stirs?
 No, no ! from out the forest prance
 A trampling troop ; I see them come !
 In one vast squadron they advance ! 210
 I strove to cry—my lips were dumb.
 The steeds rush on in plunging pride ;
 But where are they the reins to guide ?
 A thousand horse—and none to ride !
 With flowing tail, and flying mane, 215
 Wide nostrils, never stretched by pain,
 Mouths bloodless to the bit or rein,
 And feet that iron never shod,
 And flanks unscarred by spur or rod,
 A thousand horse, the wild, the free, 220
 Like waves that follow o'er the sea,
 Came thickly thundering on,
 As if our faint approach to meet ;
 The sight re-nerved my courser's feet,
 A moment staggering* feebly fleet, 225
 A moment, with a faint low neigh,
 He answered, and then fell.
 With gasps and glazing eyes he lay,
 And reeking limbs immovable,
 His first and last career is done ! 230
 On came the troop—they saw him stoop,
 They saw me strangely bound along
 His back with many a bloody thong :
 They stop—they start—they snuff the air,
 Gallop a moment here and there, 235
 Approach, retire, wheel round and round,
 Then plunging back with sudden bound,
 Headed by one black mighty steed,
 Who seemed the patriarch of his breed,
 Without a single speck or hair 240
 Of white upon his shaggy hide :
 They snort, they foam, neigh, swerve aside,

- And backward to the forest fly,
By instinct, from a human eye.
- They left me there to my despair, 245
Linked to the dead and stiffening wretch,
Whose lifeless limbs beneath me stretch,
Relieved from that unwonted weight,
From whence I could not extricate
Nor him, nor me—and there we lay, 250
The dying on the dead !
I little deemed another day
Would see my houseless, helpless head.
- ‘ The sun was sinking—still I lay
Chained to the chill and stiffening steed; 255
I thought to mingle there our clay,
And my dim eyes of death had need,
No hope arose of being freed :
I cast my last looks up the sky,
And there between me and the sun 260
I saw the expecting raven fly,
Who scarce would wait till both should die,
Ere his repast begun.*
I know no more—my latest dream
Is something of a lovely star 265
Which fixed my dull eyes from afar,
And went and came with wandering beam.
- ‘ I woke—Where was I ?—Do I see
A human face look down on me ?
And doth a roof above me close ? 270
Do these limbs on a couch repose ?
Is this a chamber where I lie ?
And is it mortal, yon bright eye,
That watches me with gentle glance ?
I close my own again once more, 275
As doubtful that the former trance
Could not as yet be o’er.

- A slender girl, long-haired, and tall,
 Sat watching by the cottage wall ;
 The sparkle of her eye I caught, 280
 Even with my first return of thought ;
 For ever and anon she threw
 A prying, pitying glance on me
 With her black eyes so wild and free :
 I gazed, and gazed, until I knew 285
 No vision it could be—
 But that I lived, and was released
 From adding to the vulture's feast :
 And when the Cossack * maid beheld
 My heavy eyes at length unsealed, 290
 She smiled, and I essayed to speak,
 But failed—and she approached, and made
 With lip and finger signs that said,
 I must not strive as yet to break
 The silence, till my strength should be 295
 Enough to leave my accents free ;
 And then her hand on mine she laid,
 And smoothed the pillow for my head,
 And stole along on tiptoe tread,
 And gently oped the door and spake 300
 In whispers—ne'er was voice so sweet !
 Even music followed her light feet ;
 But those she called were not awake.
 And she went forth ; but, ere she passed,
 Another look on me she cast, 305
 Another sign she made, to say
 That I had nought to fear, that all
 Were near, at my command or call,
 And she would not delay
 Her due return—while she was gone, 310
 Methought I felt too much alone.
- 'She came with mother and with sire—
 What need of more !—I will not tire

With long recital of the rest
 Since I became the Cossack's guest. 315
 They found me senseless on the plain—
 They bore me to the nearest hut—
 They brought me into life again—
 Me—one day o'er their realm to reign!
 Thus the vain fool who strove to glut 320
 His rage, refining on my pain,
 Sent me forth to the wilderness,
 Bound, naked, bleeding, and alone,
 To pass the desert to a throne—
 What mortal his own doom may guess? 325
 Let none despond, let none despair!
 To-morrow the Borysthenes*
 May see our coursers graze at ease
 Upon his Turkish bank;* and never
 Had I such welcome for a river 330
 As I shall yield when safely there.
 Comrades, good night!'—The Hetman* threw
 His length* beneath the oak-tree shade,
 With leafy couch already made,
 A bed nor comfortless nor new 335
 To him who took his rest whene'er
 The hour arrived, no matter where:
 His eyes the hastening slumbers steep.
 And if ye marvel Charles* forgot
 To thank his tale, he wondered not— 340
 The king had been an hour asleep.

NOTES.

THE PRISONER OF CHILLON.

The Prisoner of Chillon was written at a small inn, in the little village of Ouchy, near Lausanne, on the Lake of Geneva, where, in June 1816, Lord Byron and Shelley were detained for two days by stress of weather, after a voyage round the lake in Lord Byron's boat. It was very successful, and has always continued to be among the most popular of the poet's works.

The poem is put in the mouth of the prisoner himself, François de Bonnavard, who is supposed, after his liberation, to be narrating the story of his captivity. Bonnavard was born in 1496, at Seyssel, then apparently, as now, forming part of the territory of the Genevese Republic. In 1510 he became Prior of St Victor, adjoining Geneva. He early became conspicuous among those citizens who resisted the encroachments of the Duke of Savoy, and in 1519 he was taken prisoner by that prince, and confined for two years at Grolée. His imprisonment did not abate his patriotism, and consequently he continued to be an object of hatred of the enemies of the Republic. In 1530 he again fell into the hands of the Duke of Savoy, and was imprisoned for six years in the Castle of Chillon. It is to this period of captivity that the poem relates. In the year 1536 he was released by the Bernese, who had seized the Pays de Vaud. Bonnavard, on his deliverance, found Geneva free and reformed. The Republic hastened to shew its gratitude, by making him a citizen of Geneva, by giving him the house formerly occupied by the Vicar-General, and by bestowing upon him a pension of two hundred golden crowns. In 1537 he was admitted into the Council of Two Hundred. He appears to have died in 1570. Of the real history of Bonnavard, Byron, when he wrote the poem, seems to have been entirely ignorant. It is a most grotesque perversion of reality to represent the holder of a rich Roman Catholic benefice as an hereditary Protestant, suffering imprisonment rather than renounce the faith for which his father died, though Bonnavard did ultimately embrace the Reformed faith. The patriotic and martyr brothers of the poem are a pure invention. Bonnavard 'saw that the cause of liberty was destined to prevail, he chose his side accordingly, and he had enough nobility of mind not to desert it when to be faithful to it entailed suffering and loss.'—*Fraser's Magazine*, May 1876. This seems the utmost credit that can be given to Byron's self-sacrificing hero.

LINE

1. *Hair*. Observe that the poet has given this singular nominative a plural verb, *have*, in line 4.
4. 'Ludovico Sforza and others. The same is asserted of Marie Antoinette's, the wife of Louis XVI., though not in quite so short a period. Grief is said to have the same effect: to such, and not to fear, the change in *hairs* was to be attributed.'—BYRON.
- 11, 12. *But this*—namely, that I suffered chains and courted death—*was for my father's faith*. Line 12 forms a noun clause in apposition with *this*. The faith was that of Protestantism.
- 17, 18. *Seven*, including the father, the *one in age*.
27. *Of Gothic mould*, of Gothic or medieval architecture.
28. *Chillon*. 'The Château de Chillon is situated between Clarens and Villeneuve, which last is at one extremity of the Lake of Geneva. On its left are the entrances of the Rhone, and opposite are the heights of Meillerie, and the range of Alps above Boveret and St Gingo. Near it, on a hill behind, is a torrent; below it, washing its walls, the lake has been fathomed to a depth of eight hundred feet, French measure: within it, are a range of dungeons, in which the early Reformers, and subsequently prisoners of state, were confined. Across one of the vaults is a beam black with age, on which, we were informed, that the condemned were formerly executed. In the cells are seven pillars, or rather eight, one being half merged in the wall; in some of these are rings for the fetters and the fettered; in the pavement the steps of Bonnivard have left their traces. He was confined here several years. . . . The château is large, and seen along the lake for a great distance. The walls are white.'—BYRON. On the pillar to which Bonnivard is said to have been chained, are engraved the names of many travellers, mostly English, and among them that of Lord Byron is conspicuous.
32. *Crevices and clefts*, the narrow slits in the wall that served for windows.
35. *A marsh's meteor lamp*, Will-o'-the-Wisp.
65. *Full and free* qualify *voices*; *they were* must be understood before *not*.
71. *Ought to do*. Byron here uses *ought* in its proper and original signification of a past tense—I *ought* or owed (it was my duty) to do my best. The ordinary way of speaking, I ought to have done, would not have expressed the poet's meaning, since it would have implied that he had *not* done it. As Byron has it, it corresponds to the Latin form, *debuisset facere*.

73. *The youngest*, adjective used as a noun, in apposition with *him* in line 76.
82. *A polar day*. In the polar regions, there is a period of the year during which the sun does not set, and another when he is never seen; these periods being the longer the nearer to the pole; at the pole these periods divide the whole year between them.
91. *Below*, that is, below the sky, on earth.
95. *Had*, would have.
- 92—97. The other was as pure of mind, but strong in his frame, and of a mood which would have stood in war against the world, and perished in the foremost rank with joy, but not of a mood to endure pining in chains. The *mood* is here represented as fighting and perishing with joy, instead of the possessor of the mood.
101. *It*, that is, spirit (of the speaker).
107. *Lake Lemán*, the French name of the Lake of Geneva, the ancient *Lacus Lemanus*; Ger. *Genfer See*. This lake lies between Switzerland and Savoy. Its length is about fifty miles, and its greatest breadth eight miles. The Swiss shore is celebrated for the beauty of its scenery; and the southern French shore rises, solemn and stern, with the mountains of Savoy in the background. Byron has here exaggerated the depth of the lake, which below Chillon is about 300 feet.
129. *That* = because.
141. *Had*, would have.
142. *Had his free breathing*, if his free breathing had.
155. *It wrought*, here an impersonal verb; there was a working, a movement, a thought.
160. Nominative absolute, *being or lying* understood.
183. *Sin*, put, by the figure called personification, for the sinner.
194. *Eye*, in the objective case, governed by *with* from line 190. *Word, groan, talk, hope* are under the same government.
258. *That* is understood before this line.
279. I know not if it had just lately got its freedom.
- 285, 286. In construction, *for* is immediately connected with lines 287, 288, the intervening words being a parenthesis, which is to be construed thus: Heaven forgive that thought which, the while (that is, during the time I had it), made me, &c. *The while*, may, perhaps, be best grammatically explained as an instance of a noun in the objective case to express duration of time. (A. S. *hwil*, time.)
306. Compared with my former state, before my chain was broken, it was liberty, &c.

311. *Begun*, grammatically, should be *began*.
335. *Rhone*. The Rhone flows into the eastern extremity of the Lake of Geneva, not far from Chillon. There it is anything but blue, being quite yellow and turbid, owing to the glaciers in which it has its sources. By the time the water gets to the lower end of the lake, the mud has all subsided, and the river issues of a peculiarly clear blue. It is of the Rhone at Geneva that the poet must have been thinking.
339. *Town*, probably Villeneuve, at the east end of the Lake of Geneva.
341. Between the entrances of the Rhone and Villeneuve, is a very small island, with a few trees upon it.
358. *That* understood before this line.
379. *As*, as if.

MAZEPPA.

The subject of this poem, imbued by Lord Byron with somewhat of poetical colouring, is historical. Jan (John) Mazeppa, Hetman of the Cossacks, was born about 1645, and was descended of a poor but noble family of Podolia. He became a page at the court of John Casimir, king of Poland. Here he gave offence to a Polish nobleman, who caused him to be stripped naked, and bound upon his own horse (not a wild horse), lying upon his back, and with his head to its tail, and sent the animal off, leaving Mazeppa to his fate. The horse carried Mazeppa to his own distant home in Podolia—not to the Ukraine, as Byron represents: but Mazeppa, out of shame, fled to the Ukraine, joined the Cossacks, and by his strength, courage, and activity, rose to high distinction amongst them, and in 1687 was elected their Hetman. He won the confidence of Peter the Great, who loaded him with honours, and made him Prince of the Ukraine; but on the curtailment of the freedom of the Cossacks by Russia, Mazeppa conceived the idea of throwing off the sovereignty of the Czar, and for this purpose entered into negotiations with Charles XII. of Sweden. These and other treasons were revealed to Peter the Great, who did not credit the informants; but afterwards, being convinced of Mazeppa's guilt, caused a number of his accomplices to be put to death. Mazeppa joined Charles XII., and took part in the battle of Pultowa, after which he fled, in 1709, to Bender, and there died in the same year. Byron represents him as telling his story in a bivouac after the battle of Pultowa. Only the latter part of the poem, beginning with the ride itself, is here reprinted, and even of it there are many curtailments. Byron wrote *Mazeppa* at Ravenna in 1818. The story has also been made the subject of a novel by Bulgarin, and of two paintings by Horace Vernet.

LINE

3. *Tartar*. The Tartar horses are famous.—*Ukraine* (Slav., a frontier country or march), the name given in Poland first to the frontiers towards the Tartars and other nomads, and then to the fertile regions lying on both sides of the middle Dnieper, without any very definite limits.
8. He had only been caught for the space of one day, *day* being in the objective case expressing duration of time.
13. *Throng* in apposition with *they*.
17. Nominative absolute, *being* to be supplied.
26. *Moment*, objective of the duration of time.
47. *Pour*, infinitive mood under the government of *I saw*.
50. *That day*, objective of point of time.
51. *Launched*, agreeing with *me* in the following line.
55. Mazeppa is said to have returned at the head of ten thousand Cossacks to take vengeance on the noble who had bound him to the horse.
58. Nominative absolute, *being* understood.
- 60, 61. When the night is chequered with the northern light (the Aurora Borealis) with its crackling sound. The Aurora Borealis is alleged to be sometimes accompanied in high latitudes by a noise which has been compared to that made by rolling one piece of silk upon another.
91. Supply *that* before this line.
96. *Few and far between*. In this familiar expression, *far between* is best parsed as an adjective, though if fully expressed the sentence would be something like: And there were far distances between them.
101. *Were*. There seems no reason, but suitability of rhyme, for this being in the subjunctive mood.
102. *Were*, would be.
105. *Scarred*, hardened over.
115. *Road*, objective case, expressing distance.
156. Till it (life) having grown (become) a pang—nominative absolute.
189. Nominative absolute.
192. *Had had*, would have had.
194. But all was useless to me.
196. *Had*, would have.
197. *Had*, if they had.
199. *Starkly*, stiffly, tightly, strongly. (A.S. *stearc*; Ger. *stark*, strong; Ger. *starr*, stiff.)
205. *Methought*, impersonal verb = it appeared to me. The nominative *it* is now only understood, and the *me* (in the dative case) has become prefixed to the verb.

225. *Staggering* agrees with *he* in line 227.
263. *Begun*, properly *began*.
289. *Cossack*. The Cossacks are descendants of the ancient Russians of Novgorod and Kiev, to whom the necessity of maintaining a constant resistance to enemies has given a peculiar, warlike character. There are two principal branches of the Cossack family—the Malo-Russian Cossacks of Little Russia, and the Don Cossacks. It was into the hands of the *Saporogi*, dwelling beside the falls of the Dnieper, a tribe of the former, the more wild and rude, that Mazeppa fell.
327. *Borysthene*s, the Dnieper, a large Russian river flowing into the Black Sea. Pultowa (see introductory note above) is situated on the Worskla, a tributary of the Dnieper.
329. *Turkish bank*. Charles was hastening to cross the Dnieper and seek refuge on Turkish soil.
332. *Hetman* or *Ataman*, the title of the head or general of the Cossacks. From the earliest times the Hetman was elected by the voice of the assembled people; the mode of election being by throwing their fur caps at the candidate they preferred, and the one who had the largest number of caps was declared duly elected.
333. *Length*, by metonymy for the thing that was long—his body.
339. *Charles*, Charles XII., king of Sweden from 1697 to 1718. Being only fifteen when he ascended the throne, the neighbouring powers thought it a good opportunity to humble Sweden, then the great power of the north; and the kings of Denmark and Poland, and Peter the Great of Russia, formed a league for this purpose. The young king, however, defeated first the Danes, and then the Russians, and dethroned Augustus II., king of Poland. He followed up his successes by marching towards Moscow, but was induced by Mazeppa to proceed to the Ukraine, in hope of being joined by the Cossacks. In this hope he was disappointed, and was finally defeated by the Russians at Pultowa on June 27, 1709, and fled to Bender, in the Turkish dominions. Charles was killed at the siege of Friedrichshald in Norway, in 1718.

THE END.

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