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MAZEPPA.*

IF Lord Byron be capable of receiving any pleasure from the interest his contemporaries and countrymen take in him and his muse, the eagerness of the reception which this little tale has met with must afford abundantly such gratification. In truth the public admiration for this remarkable man has been carried to such an extreme, that to suspect the possibility of a failure in any thing he attempts, is a thing altogether out of the question. Of our other great authors even the greatest are not exempted from the workings of the common-place critical mania so entirely as Lord Byron is. We doubt very much whether there ever was any popularity so extensive as his, and at the same time founded on such deep principles, in the whole history of English poets.

Mazeppa is a very fine and spirited sketch of a very noble story, and is every way worthy of its author. The story is a well known one—namely, that of the young Pole who being bound naked on the back of a wild horse on account of an intrigue with the lady of a certain great Noble of his country, was carried by his steed into the heart of the Ukraine, and being there picked up by some Cossacks in a state apparently of utter hopelessness and exhaustion, recovered—and lived to be long after the prince and leader of the nation among whom he had arrived in this extraordinary method.

Lord Byron has represented the strange and wild incidents of this adventure, as being related in a half serious half sportive way by Mazeppa himself; to no less a person than Charles XII. of Sweden, in some of whose last campaigns the Cossack Hetman took a distinguished part. He tells it during the desolate bivouack of Charles and the few friends who fled with him towards Turkey after the bloody overthrow of Pultowa. There is not a little of beauty and gracefulness in this way of setting the picture—the age of Mazeppa—the calm practised indifference with which he now submits to the worst of fortune's deeds—the heroic unthinking coldness of the royal madman to whom he speaks—the dreary and perilous accompaniments of the scene around the speaker and the audience—all contribute to throw a very striking

charm both of preparation and of contrast over the wild story of the Hetman. Nothing can be more beautiful in like manner than the account of the love—the guilty love—the fruits of which had been so miraculous. The Polish lady is indeed a glorious creature.

“She had the Asiatic eye,
Such as our Turkish neighbourhood
Hath mingled with our Polish blood,
Dark as above as is the sky;
But through it stole a tender light,
Like the first moon-rise at midnight,
Large, dark, and swimming in the stream,
Which seemed to melt to its own beam.”

Mazeppa and she fell in love with each other at a ball, and mutual confessions escape them at a card-party. He visits her by night at her Lord's castle, and, says he,—

“The hour
In which I sought that lady's bower,
Was fiery Expectation's dower—”

But some of the menials surprise and betray them, and the stern insulted husband orders Mazeppa to be immediately bound to the horse—of the lady's fate we hear nothing.

“‘Bring forth the horse!’—the horse was brought;

In truth, he was a noble steed,
A Tartar of the Ukraine breed,
Who look'd as though the speed of thought
Were in his limbs; but he was wild,
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,
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—
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,
And on he foam'd—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
A moment from that rabble rout:
With sudden wrath I wrench'd my head,
And snapp'd the cord, which to the mane
Had bound my neck in lieu of rein,
And, writhing half my form about,
Howl'd back my curse; but 'midst the tread,
The thunder of my courser's speed,
Perchance they did not hear nor heed:

* MAZEPPA a poem by Lord Byron. Printed for John Murray. Octavo, 5s. 6d.

It vexes me—for I would fain
Have paid their insult back again.
I paid it well in after days:
There is not of that castle gate,
Its drawbridge and portcullis' weight,
Stone, bar, moat, bridge, or barrier left;
Nor of its fields a blade of grass,

Save what grows on a ridge of wall,
Where stood the hearth-stone of the hall;
And many a time ye there might pass,
Nor dream that e'er that fortress was:
I saw its turrets in a blaze,
Their crackling battlements all cleft,
And the hot lead pour down like rain,
From off the scorch'd and blackening roof,
Whose thickness was not vengeance proof.

They little thought that day of pain,
When launch'd, as on the lightning's flash,
They bade me to destruction dash,
That one day I should come again,
With twice five thousand horse, to thank
The count for his uncounteous ride.
They play'd me then a bitter prank,

When, with the wild horse for my guide,
They bound me to his foaming flank:
At length I play'd them one as frank—
For time at last sets all things even—
And if we do but watch the hour,
There never yet was human power
Which could evade, if unforgiven,
The patient search and vigil long
Of him who treasures up a wrong.

As the Hetman proceeds, it strikes
us there is a much closer resemblance
to the fiery flow of Walter Scott's chivalrous narrative, than in any of Lord Byron's former pieces. Nothing can be grander than the sweep and torrent of the horse's speed, and the slow unwearied inflexible pursuit of the wolves winding close behind him.

Away, away, my steed and I,
Upon the pinions of the wind,
All human dwellings left behind;
We sped like meteors through the sky,
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,
With their long gallop, which can tire
The bounds 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,
At day-break winding through the wood,
And through the night had heard their feet
Their stealing rustling step repeat.
Oh! how I wish'd for spear or sword,
At least to die amidst the horde,
And perish—if it must be so—
At bay, destroying many a foe.
When first my courser's race begun,
I wish'd the gaol already won;
But now I doubted strength and speed.
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,
Bewilder'd with the dazzling blast,
Than through the forest-paths he past—
Untir'd, untamed, and worse than wild;
All furious as a favour'd child
Balk'd of its wish or fiercer still;—
A woman piqued—who has her will.

The earth gave way, the skies roll'd round,
I seem'd to sink upon the ground;
But err'd for I was fastly bound.
My heart turn'd sick, my brain grew sore,
And throb'd a while, then beat no more:
The skies spun like a mighty wheel;
I saw the trees like drunkards reel,
And a slight flash sprang o'er my eyes,
Which saw no farther: he who dies
Can die no more than then I died.
O'ertortured by that ghastly ride,
I felt the blackness come and go,

And strove to wake; but could not make
My senses climb up from below:
I felt as on a plank at sea,
When all the waves that dash o'er thee,
At the same time upheave and whelm,
And hurl thee towards a desert realm.
My undulating life was as
The fancied lights that fitting pass
Our shut eyes in deep midnight, when
Fever begins upon the brain;
But soon it pass'd with little pain,
But a confusion worse than such:
I own that I should deem it much,
Dying, to feel the same again;
And yet I do suppose we must
Feel far more ere we turn to dust:
No matter; I have bared my brow
Full in Death's face—before—and now.

The next is a wonderful picture of the dream-like awaking from this swoon of utter weariness, brought about by the effect of the waves of a river into which Mazeppa plunged. My thoughts came back; where was I? Cold, and numb, and giddy; pulse by pulse Life reassumed its lingering hold, and throb by throb; till grown a pang Which for a moment would convulse, My blood reflow'd, though thick and chill; My ear with uncouth noises rang, My heart began once more to thrill; My sight return'd, though dim; alas! And thicken'd, 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; 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 you unknown and silent shore.

The waters broke my hollow trance,
And with a temporary strength
My stiffen'd limbs were rebaptized.
My courser's broad breast proudly braves,
And dashes off the ascending waves
And onward we advance!
We reach the slippery shore at length,
A haven I but little prized,

For all behind was dark and drear,
 And all before was night and fear.
 How many hours of night or day
 In those suspended pangs I lay,
 I could not tell; I scarcely knew
 If this were human breath I drew.
 With glossy skin, and dripping mane,
 And reeling limbs, and reeking flank,
 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
 Like precipices in our dreams,
 To stretch beyond the sight;
 And here and there a speck of white,
 Or scatter'd spot of dusky green,
 In masses broke into the light,
 As rose the moon upon my right.
 But nought distinctly seen
 In the dim waste, would indicate
 The omen of a cottage gate;
 No twinkling taper from afar;
 Stood like an hospitable star;
 Not even an ignis-fatuus rose
 To make him merry with my woes:
 That very cheat had cheer'd me then!
 Although detected, welcome still,
 Reminding me, through every ill,
 Of the abodes of men."

Then comes one of the dreary and
 limitless steppes of the Ukraine.

"Onward we went—but slack and slow;
 His savage force at length o'erwent,
 The drooping courser, faint and low,
 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 avail'd,
 My limbs were bound; my force had fail'd,
 Perchance, had they been free.
 With feeble effort still I tried
 To rend the bonds so starkly tied—
 But still it was in vain;
 My limbs were only wrung the more,
 And soon the idle strife gave o'er,
 Which but prolong'd their pain:
 Up rose the sun; the mists were curl'd
 Back from the solitary world
 Which lay around—behind—before:
 What booted it to traverse o'er
 Plain, forest, river? Man nor brute,
 Nor dint of hoof, nor print of foot,
 Lay in the wild luxuriant soil;
 No sign of travel—none of toil;
 The very air was mute;
 And not an insect's shrill small horn,
 Nor matin bird's new voice was borne
 From herb nor thicket. Many a wretch,
 Panting as if his heart would burst,
 The weary brute still staggered on;
 And still we were—or seemed—alone:
 At length, while reeling on our way
 Methought I heard a courser neigh,
 From out yon tuft of blackening firs.
 Is it the wind those branches stir?
 No, no! from out the forest prance

A tramping troop; I see them come!
 In one vast squadron they advance!

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 main,
 Wide nostrils—never stretch'd 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,
 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,
 A moment, with a faint low neigh,
 He answer'd, and then fell;
 With gasps and glazing eyes he lay,
 And reeking limbs immoveable,
 His first and last career is done!
 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,
 Approach, retire, wheel round and round,
 Then plunging back with sudden bound,
 Headed by one black mighty steed,
 Who seem'd the patriarch of his breed,
 Without a single speck or hair
 Of white upon his shaggy hide;
 They snort—they foam—neigh—swerve a-
 side.
 And backward to the forest fly,
 By instinct, from a human eye—
 They left me there, to my despair,
 Link'd 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,
 The dying on the dead!
 I little deem'd another day
 Would see my houseless, helpless head."

* * * * *

The next incident—that of the ravens—surpasses, we think, even those of the wolves and the horses.

"And there from morn till twilight bound,
 I felt the heavy hours toil round,
 With just enough of life to see
 My last of suns go down on me,
 In hopeless certainty of mind,
 That makes us feel at length resign'd
 To that which our foreboding years
 Presents the worst and last of fears
 Inevitable—even a boon,
 Nor more unkind for coming soon;
 Yet shunn'd and dreaded with such care,
 As if it only were a snare

That prudence might escape:
 At times both wish'd for and implored,
 At times sought with self-pointed sword,
 Yet still a dark and hideous close

To even intolerable woes,

And welcome in no shape.
And strange to say, the sons of pleasure,
They who have revell'd beyond measure
In beauty, wassail, wine, and treasure,
Die calm, or calmer, oft than he
Whose heritage was misery :
For he who hath in turn run through
All that was beautiful and new,

Hath nought to hope, and nought to
leave ;

And, save the future, (which is view'd
Not quite as men are base or good,
But as their nerves may be endured,)

With nought perhaps to grieve :—
The wretch still hopes his woes must end,
And Death, whom he should deem his
friend,

Appears to his distemper'd eyes,
Arrived to rob him of his prize,
The tree of his new Paradise.
To-morrow would have given him all,
Repaid his pangs, repair'd his fall ;
To-morrow would have been the first
Of days no more deplored or curst,
But bright, and long, and beckoning years,
Seen dazzling through the mist of tears,
Guerdorf of many a painful hour ;
To-morrow would have given him power
To rule, to shine, to smite, to save—
And must it dawn upon his grave !

“ The sun was sinking—still I lay
Chained to the chill and stiffening steed,
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
I saw the expecting raven fly,
Who scarce would wait till both should die,
Ere his repast begun ;

He flew, and perch'd, then flew once more,
And each time nearer than before ;
I saw his wing through twilight flit,
And once so near me he alit

I could have smote, but lack'd the
strength ;

But the slight motion of my hand,
And feeble scratching of the sand,
The exerted throat's faint struggling noise,
Which scarcely could be call'd a voice,
Together scared him off at length.—

I know no more—my latest dream
Is something of a lovely star

Which fix'd my dull eyes from afar,
And went and came with wandering beam,
And of the cold, dull, swimming, dense
Sensation of recurring sense,
And then subsiding back to death,
And then again a little breath,
A little thrill, a short suspense,

An icy sickness curdling o'er
My heart, and sparks that cross'd my brain—
A gasp, a throb, a start of pain,
A sigh, and nothing more.”

Mazeppa awakes in a Cossack cot-
tage, where his slumbers of outworn
nature are watched by such a figure
as Allan would love to paint.

A slender girl—long haired and tall
Sat watching by the cottage wall,
The sparkle of her eye I caught,
Even with my first return of thought.

For ever and anon she threw
A prying pitying glance at me,
I gazed, I gazed until I knew
No vision it would 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 unseal'd,
She smiled—and I essay'd to speak,

But fail'd—and she approach'd, and made
With lip and finger signs that said,
I must not strive as yet to break
The silence, till my strength should be
Enough to leave my accents free ;
And then her hand on mine she laid,
And smooth'd the pillow for my head,
And stole along on tiptoe tread,

And gently open'd the door, and spake
In whisper—ne'er was voice so sweet !
Even music follow'd her light feet :—

But those she call'd were not awake,
And she went forth ; but, ere she pass'd,
Another look on me she cast,

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,
Methought I felt too much alone.”

The whole of this charming story is
worthy of Lord Byron. We wish we
could say as much of an ode and a
prose fragment which he had added to
make up his pamphlet. The former
is a foolish piece of heartless disloyal
raving—truly pitiable in the son of the
old Byrons—the other is a little driv-
elling story, not much better to our
mind than *the Vampyre*—that auda-
cious and unprincipled forgery of Dr
Polidori. It is all very well for any
Italian teacher or doctor to write an
imitation of any author he pleases—
but to publish such an imitation, with
the author's name, is a vile pilfering
of the pockets of the public, and alike
shameful to the hack who executes,
and the publisher who countenances
the imposition. We are sorry to see
so respectable a publisher as Mr Col-
burn permitting any such doings to go
on under his auspices. We are sure
he will never do so again.