

## CRITICAL REVIEW

The *CRITICAL REVIEW* (1756-1817), a monthly whose first editor had been Tobias Smollett, was the same kind of journal as the *Monthly Review*, but it lacked the continuity of the Griffiths' publication. Derek Roper's study of the shifts in "The Politics of the *Critical Review*, 1756-1817," *Durham University Journal*, 2nd Series, XXII (1961), 117-122, provides a convenient index to its many changes of ownership. (See also John O. Hayden, *The Romantic*

*Reviewers*, University of Chicago Press, 1969, pp. 42-44.) A succession of publishers employed a succession of editors in the 1790's and first two decades of the nineteenth century in a vain attempt to recapture a readership partly alienated through the erratic behavior of the *Critical* itself and partly lost to the quarterlies. It died, significantly, just as Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine* launched its new journalism of wit and personal abuse.

### September 1807

Byron, *Hours of Idleness* (1807); review by John Higgs Hunt, *Critical Review*, 3rd Series, XII (Sept. 1807), 47-53. This John Hunt (not to be confused with Leigh Hunt's brother John) had been a Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, since 1804 and would have known the young lord. Hunt had been appointed editor of the *Critical Review* in 1805 when J. Mawman had become publisher, but under Hunt's direction the *Critical* had slipped in prestige, and by October 1807 Robert Fellowes was co-editor. Hunt's praise of Byron's poems seems a little excessive, but we cannot be certain that he had not recently reviewed a dozen much weaker volumes of miscellaneous poems.

ART. VI.—*Hours of Idleness, a Series of Poems, original and translated.* By George Gordon, Lord Byron, a Minor. 12mo. 6s. Longman, &c.

'THE opinion of Dr. Johnson on the poems of a noble relation of mine, "That, when a man of rank appeared in the character of an author, his merit should be handsomely acknowledged," can have little weight with verbal, and still less with periodical censors; but, were it otherwise, I should be loth to avail myself of the privilege, and would rather incur the bitterest censure of anonymous criticism, than triumph in honours granted solely to a title.' Pref. p. ix.

*Lord Byron's Hours of Idleness.*

Miserum est aliorum incumbere Famæ.

The favour which this author disclaims we willingly withhold; still more readily do we deny him that which youth is apt to expect. From a spirit of just pride, he asks for his book no allowances; from our opinion of its real merit, we offer it none.

The preface announces a collection of trifles, the motley production of idle, gay, and melancholy hours. To waste pages of unmeaning criticism on so unambitious a work, would but expose our want of judgment, and provoke the contempt of its author. The few specimens which we shall give, require no praise of ours. Their own worth is sufficient to support them; and no reader will be inclined to doubt our assertion that the rest of the book contains as ample evidence of a correct taste, a warm imagination, and a feeling heart, as exists in the little extracts before him.

*On leaving Newstead Abbey.*

'Thro' thy battlements, Newstead, the hollow winds whistle;  
Thou, the hall of my fathers, art gone to decay;  
In thy once smiling garden, the hemlock and thistle  
Have choaked up the rose which late bloom'd in the way.

Of the mail-cover'd Barons, who proudly to battle,  
Led their vassals from Europe to Palestine's plain,  
The escutcheon and shield, which with ev'ry blest rattle,  
Are the only sad vestiges now that remain.

No more doth old Robert, with harp-stringing numbers,  
Raise a flame in the breast for the war-laurel'd wreath;  
Near Askalon's towers, John of Horiston slumbers;  
Unnerv'd is the hand of the minstrel by death.

Paul and Hubert too sleep, in the valley of Cressy,  
For the safety of Edward and England they fell.  
My fathers! the tears of your country redress you;  
How you fought, how you died, still her annals can tell.

On Marston, with Rupert, 'gainst traitors contending,  
Four brothers enrich'd, with their blood, the bleak field;  
For the rights of a monarch, their country defending,  
Till death their attachment to royalty seal'd.

Shades of heroes, farewell! your descendant, departing  
From the seat of his ancestors, bids you adieu!  
Abroad, or at home, your remembrance imparting  
New courage, he'll think upon glory, and you.

*Lord Byron's Hours of Idleness.*

'Though a tear dim his eye, at this sad separation,  
'Tis nature, not fear, that excites his regret;  
Far distant he goes, with the same emulation,  
The fame of his fathers he ne'er can forget.

That fame, and that memory, still will be cherish,  
He vows that he ne'er will disgrace your renown;  
Like you will he live, or like you will he perish;  
When decay'd, may he mingle his dust with your own.'

The history of this venerable ruin, connected with that of many of its old possessors, the author's ancestors, deserves, and obtains, the honour of another poem of greater length and of more correctness (being probably composed at a later period) than the preceding. The conclusion affected us in a very peculiar manner; and while we warmly entered into the generous and noble sentiments which inspired the writer, we could not but hail, with something of prophetic rapture, the hope conveyed in the closing stanza.

'Newstead! what saddening change of scene is thine!  
Thy yawning arch betokens slow decay;  
The last and youngest of a noble line  
Now holds thy mouldering turrets in his sway.

'Deserted now, he scans thy grey-worn towers;  
Thy vaults, where dead of feudal ages sleep;  
Thy cloisters, pervious to the wintry showers;  
These, these, he views, and views them but to weep.

'Yet are his tears, no emblems of regret——  
Cherish'd affection only bids them flow;  
Pride, Hope, and Love, forbid him to forget,  
But warm his bosom with empassion'd glow.

'Yet he prefers thee to the gilded domes,  
Or gewgaw grottos, of the vainly great:  
Yet lingers 'mid thy damp and mossy tombs,  
Nor breathes a murmur 'gainst the will of fate.

'Haply thy Sun, emerging, yet, may shine,  
Thee to irradiate, with meridian ray:  
Fortune may smile upon a future line,  
And Heaven restore an ever cloudless day.'

No man was ever a poet at nineteen, without being a lover also; and Lord Byron's heart, if we may judge of it from his verses, is steeled against none of the warm and tender impressions of nature. Of the amatory poems in this collection, many are extremely pleasing, all are easy  
CRIT. REV. Vol. 12. September, 1807. E

*Lord Byron's Hours of Idleness.*

and unaffected, and (what to so young a man is a rare and exalted praise) free from the slightest taint of immodesty.

His 'Tale of Terror' is far superior to the generality of those productions which it most resembles; we will not compare it with the best of Walter Scott's ballads; but can truly say that it discovers the existence of powers equal to maintain such a comparison.

The grave and laborious follies of collegers and schoolmen, which occupy the largest theatre on which our author has hitherto been able to witness the farce of life, call forth his talent for satire. Prudence has not yet taught him to be very sparing in the exercise of his weapon, nor experience, to be always judicious in the choice of subjects; but a few years or months will let loose to his pursuit the 'higher game' of the world; and he has enough within him to constitute a keen and successful sportsman.

But, however high a rank he might attain in the departments of love, romance, and satire, it is in tenderness and pathos that his real excellence, as a poet, will consist. None of his compositions have afforded us so high a gratification, because none reflects so clear and beautiful an image of the composer's mind, as that entitled 'Childish Recollections,' in which he looks back (in an hour of sickness and depression) on the school which he had lately quitted, on the scenes, the pleasures, the cares, the passions, the companions, of his boyish days, to which he had lately bade adieu. He views them, it is true, with some of the prejudices remaining to which his past situation gave birth; for his is not a mind from which impressions either of attachment or dislike, of gratitude or resentment can be soon effaced. We could wish that, in his writings, at least, the former only had been suffered to appear, without their contrasts; but his spirit is as ardent as it is lofty, and he is not yet sufficiently experienced to appreciate, and distinguish, the errors which arise from want of judgment and from want of principle.

We return to our more pleasing task; and shall select such passages, as can give pleasure only, from this delightful poem.

' Oft does my heart indulge the rising thought,  
Which still recurs, unlook'd-for, and unsought;  
My soul to fancy's fond suggestion yields,  
And roams romantic o'er her airy fields;  
Scenes of my youth, develop'd, crowd to view,  
To which I long have bade a last adieu!  
Seats of delight, inspiring youthful themes;  
Friends lost to me for aye, except in dreams;

*Lord Byron's Hours of Idleness.*

Some who in marble prematurely sleep,  
Whose forms I now remember, but to weep;  
Some, who yet urge the same scholastic course  
Of early science, future fame the source;  
Who, still contending in the studious race,  
In quick rotation, fill the senior place!  
These, with a thousand visions, now unite  
To dazzle, tho' they please, my aching sight.

' Ida! blest spot, where science holds her reign,  
How joyous, once, I join'd the youthful train;  
Bright, in idea, gleams thy lofty spire,  
Again I mingle with thy playful quire;  
Our tricks of mischief, every childish game,  
Unchang'd by time or distance, seem the same;  
Through winding paths, along the glade, I trace  
The social smile of every welcome face,  
My wonted haunts, my scenes of joy or woe,  
Each early boyish friend or youthful foe;  
Her feuds dissolv'd, but not my friendship past,  
I bless the former, and forgive the last.  
Hours of my youth, when nurtur'd in my breast,  
To love a stranger, friendship made me blest;  
Friendship, the dear peculiar bond of youth,  
When every artless bosom throbs with truth,  
Untaught by worldly wisdom how to feign,  
And check each impulse with prudential rein;  
When, all we feel, our honest souls disclose,  
In love to friends, in open hate to foes:  
No varnish'd tales the lips of youth repeat,  
No dear-bought knowledge purchas'd by deceit;  
Hypocrisy, the gift of lengthen'd years,  
Matur'd by age, the garb of prudence wears;  
When now the boy is ripen'd into man,  
His careful sire chalks out some wary plan;  
Instructs his son from candour's path to shrink,  
Smoothly to speak, and cautiously to think;  
Still to assent, and never to deny,  
A patron's praise can well reward the lie;  
And who, when Fortune's warning voice is heard,  
Would lose his opening prospects for a word?  
Although, against that word, his soul rebel,  
And truth, indignant, all his bosom swell.'

After a very grateful tribute to the memory of  
The dear preceptor of his earlier days,  
who relinquished his situation at 'Ida' some time previous to his own departure, he returns to his friends, and thus apostrophises them:

E 2

*Lord Byron's Hours of Idleness.*

' Dear honest race, though now we meet no more,  
 One last, long look on what we were before ;  
 Our first kind greetings, and our last adieu,  
 Drew tears from eyes unused to weep with you ;  
 Through splendid circles, fashion's gaudy world,  
 Where Folly's glaring standard was unfurl'd,  
 I plung'd to drown in noise my fond regret,  
 And all I sought or hoped, was to forget ;  
 Vain wish ! if, chance, some well-remember'd face,  
 Some old companion of my early race,  
 Advanc'd to claim his friend with honest joy,  
 My eyes, my heart, proclaim'd me still a boy ;  
 The glittering scene, the fluttering groupes around,  
 Were quite forgotten when my friend was found ;  
 The smiles of beauty (for alas ! I've known  
 What 'tis to bend before love's mighty throne ;)  
 The smiles of beauty, though those smiles were dear,  
 Could hardly charm me when my friend was near ;  
 My thoughts bewilder'd in the fond surprise,  
 The woods of Ida danced before my eyes ;  
 I saw the sprightly wanderers pour along,  
 I saw, and join'd again the joyous throng ;  
 Panting again, I trac'd her lofty grove,  
 And friendship's feelings triumph'd over love.

' Yet, why should I alone with such delight  
 Retrace the circuit of my former flight ?  
 Is there no cause, beyond the common claim  
 Endear'd to all in Childhood's very name ?  
 Ah ! sure some stronger impulse vibrates here,  
 Which whispers, Friendship will be doubly dear  
 To one, who thus for kindred hearts must roam,  
 And seek abroad the love denied at home,  
 Those hearts, dear Ida, have I found in thee,  
 A home, a world, a paradise, to me.  
 Stern death forbade my orphan youth to share  
 The tender guidance of a father's care ;  
 Can rank, or ev'n a guardian's name, supply  
 The love which glistens in a father's eye ?  
 For this, can wealth, or title's sound atone,  
 Made, by a parent's early loss, my own ?  
 What brother springs, a brother's love to seek ?  
 What sister's gentle kiss has press'd my cheek ?  
 For me, how dull the vacant moments rise,  
 To no fond bosom link'd by kindred ties :  
 Oft, in the progress of some fleeting dream,  
 Fraternal smiles, collected round me seem,  
 While still the visions to my heart are press'd,  
 The voice of love will murmur in my rest ;  
 I hear, I wake, and in the sound rejoice,  
 I hear again,—but ah ! no brother's voice.

A hermit, midst of crowds, I fain must stray,  
 Alone, though thousand pilgrims fill the way ;  
 While these a thousand kindred wreaths entwine,  
 I cannot call one single blossom mine :  
 What then remains ? in solitude to groan,  
 To mix in friendship, or to sigh alone ?  
 Thus must I cling to some endearing hand,  
 And none more dear than Ida's social band.

We cannot now follow the poet, as we would gladly do, through the characteristic, but tender, descriptions of three or four of his most intimate associates, nor to the conclusion of this affecting poem, which does not fall short of the passages which we have already quoted. Valuable, as this little collection is, from its intrinsic merit, it is rendered much more so by the mind which produced and pervades it. We must now advert to that nobility of birth which we disdain to use as an apology for faults or a heightener of beauties, for the purpose of urging the writer (whose superior genius and high sense of honour are equally apparent in his works) to follow that course of virtuous ambition for which nature and inclination may best fit him, with energy and perseverance, and thus to run a career worthy of his character and talents, and of the genuine pride of an illustrious ancestry.

Let him also remember that a life of vigorous action or of severe study is not incompatible with occasional pursuits of the same nature as those he has already indulged in ; and, wherever his future lot may be cast, we shall continue to entertain a hope (notwithstanding the act of abjuration in his preface) of hailing, on some future occasion, his honourable progress in the ranks of poetry.