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PARISINA.

## INTRODUCTION TO *PARISINA*.

*Parisina*, which had been begun before the *Siege of Corinth*, was transcribed by Lady Byron, and sent to the publisher at the beginning of December, 1815. Murray confessed that he had been alarmed by some hints which Byron had dropped as to the plot of the narrative, but was reassured when he traced “the delicate hand that transcribed it.” He could not say enough of this “Pearl” of great price. “It is very interesting, pathetic, beautiful—do you know I would almost say moral” (*Memoir of John Murray*, 1891, i. 353). Ward, to whom the MS. of *Parisina* was shown, and Isaac D’Israeli, who heard it read aloud by Murray, were enthusiastic as to its merits; and Gifford, who had mingled censure with praise in his critical appreciation of the *Siege*, declared that the author “had never surpassed *Parisina*.”

The last and shortest of the six narrative poems composed and published in the four years (the first years of manhood and of fame, the only years of manhood passed at home in England) which elapsed between the appearance of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* and the third, *Parisina* has, perhaps, never yet received its due. At the time of its appearance it shared the odium which was provoked by the publication of *Fare Thee Well* and *A Sketch*, and before there was time to reconsider the new volume on its own merits, the new canto of *Childe Harold*, followed almost immediately by the *Prisoner of Chillon* and its brilliant and noticeable companion poems, usurped the attention of friend and foe. Contemporary critics (with the exception of the *Monthly* and *Critical Reviews*) fell foul of the subject-matter of the poem—the guilty passion of a bastard son for his father’s wife. “It was too disgusting to be rendered pleasing by any display of genius” (*European Magazine*); “The story of *Parisina* includes adultery not to be named” (*Literary Panorama*); while the *Eclectic*, on grounds of taste rather than of morals, gave judgment that “the subject of the tale was purely unpleasing”—“the impression left simply painful.”

Byron, no doubt, for better or worse, was in advance of his age, in the pursuit of art for art’s sake, and in his indifference, not to morality—the *dénouement* of the story is severely moral—but to the moral edification of his readers. The tale was chosen because it is a tale of love and guilt and woe, and the poet,

unconcerned with any other issue, sets the tale to an enchanting melody. It does not occur to him to condone or to reprobate the loves of Hugo and Parisina, and in detailing the issue leaves the actors to their fate. It was this aloofness from ethical considerations which perturbed and irritated the “canters,” as Byron called them—the children and champions of the anti-revolution. The modern reader, without being attracted or repelled by the *motif* of the story, will take pleasure in the sustained energy and sure beauty of the poetic strain. Byron may have gone to the “nakedness of history” for his facts, but he clothed them in singing robes of a delicate and shining texture.

to  
Scrope Berdmore Davies, Esq.  
the following poem  
is inscribed,  
by one who has long admired his talents  
and valued his friendship.

*January 22, 1816.*

## ADVERTISEMENT.

The following poem is grounded on a circumstance mentioned in Gibbon's "Antiquities of the House of Brunswick." I am aware, that in modern times, the delicacy or fastidiousness of the reader may deem such subjects unfit for the purposes of poetry. The Greek dramatists, and some of the best of our old English writers, were of a different opinion: as Alfieri and Schiller have also been, more recently, upon the Continent. The following extract will explain the facts on which the story is founded. The name of *Azo* is substituted for Nicholas, as more metrical.—[B.]

"Under the reign of Nicholas III. [A.D. 1425] Ferrara was polluted with a domestic tragedy. By the testimony of a maid, and his own observation, the Marquis of Este discovered the incestuous loves of his wife Parisina, and Hugo his bastard son, a beautiful and valiant youth. They were beheaded in the castle by the sentence of a father and husband, who published his shame, and survived their execution.<sup>1</sup> He was unfortunate, if they were guilty: if they were innocent, he was still more unfortunate; nor is there any possible situation in which I can sincerely approve the last act of the justice of a parent."—Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. iii. p. 470.—[Ed. 1837, p. 830.]

<sup>1</sup> ["Ferrara is much decayed and depopulated; but the castle still exists entire; and I saw the court where Parisina and Hugo were beheaded, according to the annal of Gibbon."—*Vide* Advertisement to *Lament of Tasso*.]



## PARISINA.<sup>2</sup>

### I.

It is the hour when from the boughs<sup>3</sup>  
    The nightingale's high note is heard;  
It is the hour when lovers' vows  
    Seem sweet in every whispered word;  
And gentle winds, and waters near,  
Make music to the lonely ear.  
Each flower the dews have lightly wet,  
And in the sky the stars are met,  
And on the wave is deeper blue,  
And on the leaf a browner hue,  
And in the heaven that clear obscure,  
So softly dark, and darkly pure,  
Which follows the decline of day,  
As twilight melts beneath the moon away.<sup>4</sup>

10

### II.

But it is not to list to the waterfall  
That Parisina leaves her hall,  
And it is not to gaze on the heavenly light  
That the Lady walks in the shadow of night;  
And if she sits in Este's bower,  
'Tis not for the sake of its full-blown flower;  
She listens—but not for the nightingale—  
Though her ear expects as soft a tale.

20

There glides a step through the foliage thick,  
And her cheek grows pale, and her heart beats quick.  
There whispers a voice through the rustling leaves,  
And her blush returns, and her bosom heaves:  
A moment more—and they shall meet—  
'Tis past—her Lover's at her feet.

III.

And what unto them is the world beside,  
With all its change of time and tide?  
Its living things—its earth and sky—  
Are nothing to their mind and eye.

30

And heedless as the dead are they  
Of aught around, above, beneath;  
As if all else had passed away,

They only for each other breathe;  
Their very sighs are full of joy  
So deep, that did it not decay,

That happy madness would destroy

The hearts which feel its fiery sway:  
Of guilt, of peril, do they deem  
In that tumultuous tender dream?  
Who that have felt that passion's power,  
Or paused, or feared in such an hour?  
Or thought how brief such moments last?  
But yet—they are already past!

40

Alas! we must awake before

We know such vision comes no more.

IV.

With many a lingering look they leave

The spot of guilty gladness past:

50

And though they hope, and vow, they grieve,

As if that parting were the last.

The frequent sigh—the long embrace—

The lip that there would cling for ever,

While gleams on Parisina's face

The Heaven she fears will not forgive her,

As if each calmly conscious star

Beheld her frailty from afar—

The frequent sigh, the long embrace,

Yet binds them to their trysting-place.

60

But it must come, and they must part

In fearful heaviness of heart,

With all the deep and shuddering chill

Which follows fast the deeds of ill.

V.

And Hugo is gone to his lonely bed,

To covet there another's bride;

But she must lay her conscious head

A husband's trusting heart beside.

But fevered in her sleep she seems,

And red her cheek with troubled dreams,

70

And mutters she in her unrest

A name she dare not breathe by day,<sup>5</sup>

And clasps her Lord unto the breast

Which pants for one away:

And he to that embrace awakes,

And, happy in the thought, mistakes

That dreaming sigh, and warm caress,

For such as he was wont to bless;

And could in very fondness weep

O'er her who loves him even in sleep.

80

VI.

He clasped her sleeping to his heart,

And listened to each broken word:

He hears—Why doth Prince Azo start,

As if the Archangel's voice he heard?

And well he may—a deeper doom

Could scarcely thunder o'er his tomb,

When he shall wake to sleep no more,

And stand the eternal throne before.

And well he may—his earthly peace

Upon that sound is doomed to cease.

90

That sleeping whisper of a name

Bespeaks her guilt and Azo's shame.

And whose that name? that o'er his pillow

Sounds fearful as the breaking billow,

Which rolls the plank upon the shore,

And dashes on the pointed rock

The wretch who sinks to rise no more,—

So came upon his soul the shock.

And whose that name?—'tis Hugo's,—his—

In sooth he had not deemed of this!—

100

'Tis Hugo's,—he, the child of one

He loved—his own all-evil son—

The offspring of his wayward youth,

When he betrayed Bianca's truth,<sup>6</sup>

The maid whose folly could confide

In him who made her not his bride.

VII.

He plucked his poniard in its sheath,

But sheathed it ere the point was bare;

Howe'er unworthy now to breathe,

He could not slay a thing so fair—

110

At least, not smiling—sleeping—there—

Nay, more:—he did not wake her then,

But gazed upon her with a glance

Which, had she roused her from her trance,

Had frozen her sense to sleep again;

And o'er his brow the burning lamp

Gleamed on the dew-drops big and damp.

She spake no more—but still she slumbered—

While, in his thought, her days are numbered.

VIII.

And with the morn he sought and found,

120

In many a tale from those around,  
The proof of all he feared to know,  
Their present guilt—his future woe;  
The long-conniving damsels seek  
    To save themselves, and would transfer  
    The guilt—the shame—the doom—to her:  
Concealment is no more—they speak  
All circumstance which may compel  
Full credence to the tale they tell:  
And Azo's tortured heart and ear  
Have nothing more to feel or hear.

130

IX.

He was not one who brooked delay:  
    Within the chamber of his state,  
The Chief of Este's ancient sway  
    Upon his throne of judgement sate;  
His nobles and his guards are there,—  
Before him is the sinful pair;  
Both young,—and *one* how passing fair!  
With swordless belt, and fettered hand,  
Oh, Christ! that thus a son should stand  
    Before a father's face!  
Yet thus must Hugo meet his sire,  
And hear the sentence of his ire,  
    The tale of his disgrace!  
And yet he seems not overcome,

140

Although, as yet, his voice be dumb.

X.

And still,—and pale—and silently

Did Parisina wait her doom;

How changed since last her speaking eye

Glanced gladness round the glittering room, 150

Where high-born men were proud to wait—

Where Beauty watched to imitate

Her gentle voice—her lovely mien—

And gather from her air and gait

The graces of its Queen:

Then,—had her eye in sorrow wept,

A thousand warriors forth had leapt,

A thousand swords had sheathless shone,

And made her quarrel all their own.<sup>7</sup>

Now,—what is she? and what are they? 160

Can she command, or these obey?

All silent and unheeding now,

With downcast eyes and knitting brow,

And folded arms, and freezing air,

And lips that scarce their scorn forbear,

Her knights, her dames, her court—is there:

And he—the chosen one, whose lance

Had yet been couched before her glance,

Who—were his arm a moment free—

Had died or gained her liberty; 170

The minion of his father's bride,—  
He, too, is fettered by her side;  
Nor sees her swoln and full eye swim  
Less for her own despair than him:  
Those lids—o'er which the violet vein  
Wandering, leaves a tender stain,  
Shining through the smoothest white  
That e'er did softest kiss invite—  
Now seemed with hot and livid glow  
To press, not shade, the orbs below;  
Which glance so heavily, and fill,  
As tear on tear grows gathering still<sup>8</sup>

180

XI.

And he for her had also wept,  
    But for the eyes that on him gazed:  
His sorrow, if he felt it, slept;  
    Stern and erect his brow was raised.  
Whate'er the grief his soul avowed,  
He would not shrink before the crowd;  
But yet he dared not look on her;  
Remembrance of the hours that were—  
His guilt—his love—his present state—  
His father's wrath, all good men's hate—  
His earthly, his eternal fate—  
And hers,—oh, hers! he dared not throw  
One look upon that death-like brow!

190

Else had his rising heart betrayed  
Remorse for all the wreck it made.

XII.

And Azo spake:—"But yesterday

I gloried in a wife and son;

That dream this morning passed away;

200

Ere day declines, I shall have none.

My life must linger on alone;

Well,—let that pass,—there breathes not one

Who would not do as I have done:

Those ties are broken—not by me;

Let that too pass;—the doom's prepared!

Hugo, the priest awaits on thee,

And then—thy crime's reward!

Away! address thy prayers to Heaven.

Before its evening stars are met,

210

Learn if thou there canst be forgiven:

Its mercy may absolve thee yet.

But here, upon the earth beneath,

There is no spot where thou and I

Together for an hour could breathe:

Farewell! I will not see thee die—

But thou, frail thing! shall view his head—

Away! I cannot speak the rest:

Go! woman of the wanton breast;

Not I, but thou his blood dost shed:

220

Go! if that sight thou canst outlive,  
And joy thee in the life I give.”

XIII.

And here stern Azo hid his face—

For on his brow the swelling vein  
Throbb'd as if back upon his brain  
The hot blood ebb'd and flow'd again;

And therefore bow'd he for a space,

And pass'd his shaking hand along  
His eye, to veil it from the throng;

While Hugo rais'd his chain'd hands,

230

And for a brief delay demands

His father's ear: the silent sire

Forbids not what his words require.

“It is not that I dread the death—

For thou hast seen me by thy side

All redly through the battle ride,

And that—not once a useless brand—

Thy slaves have wrested from my hand

Hath shed more blood in cause of thine,

Than e'er can stain the axe of mine:<sup>9</sup>

240

Thou gav'st, and may'st resume my breath,

A gift for which I thank thee not;

Nor are my mother's wrongs forgot,

Her slighted love and ruined name,

Her offspring's heritage of shame;

But she is in the grave, where he,  
Her son—thy rival—soon shall be.  
Her broken heart—my severed head—  
Shall witness for thee from the dead  
How trusty and how tender were  
Thy youthful love—paternal care.

250

'Tis true that I have done thee wrong—  
    But wrong for wrong:—this,—deemed thy bride,  
    The other victim of thy pride,—  
Thou know'st for me was destined long;  
Thou saw'st, and coveted'st her charms;  
    And with thy very crime—my birth,—  
    Thou taunted'st me—as little worth;

A match ignoble for her arms;  
Because, forsooth, I could not claim  
The lawful heirship of thy name,  
Nor sit on Este's lineal throne;

260

    Yet, were a few short summers mine,  
    My name should more than Este's shine  
With honours all my own.

I had a sword—and have a breast  
That should have won as haught<sup>10</sup> a crest  
As ever waved along the line  
Of all these sovereign sires of thine.

Not always knightly spurs are worn  
The brightest by the better born;  
And mine have lanced my courser's flank

270

Before proud chiefs of princely rank,  
When charging to the cheering cry  
Of 'Este and of Victory!'  
I will not plead the cause of crime,  
Nor sue thee to redeem from time  
A few brief hours or days that must  
At length roll o'er my reckless dust;—  
Such maddening moments as my past,  
They could not, and they did not, last;—  
Albeit my birth and name be base,  
And thy nobility of race  
Disdained to deck a thing like me—

280

    Yet in my lineaments they trace  
    Some features of my father's face,  
And in my spirit—all of thee.  
From thee this tamelessness of heart—  
From thee—nay, wherefore dost thou start?—  
From thee in all their vigour came  
My arm of strength, my soul of flame—  
Thou didst not give me life alone,  
But all that made me more thine own.  
See what thy guilty love hath done!  
Repaid thee with too like a son!  
I am no bastard in my soul,  
For that, like thine, abhorred control;  
And for my breath, that hasty boon  
Thou gav'st and wilt resume so soon,

290

I valued it no more than thou,

300

When rose thy casque above thy brow,

And we, all side by side, have striven,

And o'er the dead our coursers driven:

The past is nothing—and at last

The future can but be the past;<sup>11</sup>

Yet would I that I then had died:

For though thou work'dst my mother's ill,

And made thy own my destined bride,

I feel thou art my father still:

And harsh as sounds thy hard decree,

310

'Tis not unjust, although from thee.

Begot in sin, to die in shame,

My life begun and ends the same:

As erred the sire, so erred the son,

And thou must punish both in one.

My crime seems worst to human view,

But God must judge between us too!"<sup>12</sup>

XIV.

He ceased—and stood with folded arms,

On which the circling fetters sounded;

And not an ear but felt as wounded,

320

Of all the chiefs that there were ranked,

When those dull chains in meeting clanked:

Till Parisina's fatal charms<sup>13</sup>

Again attracted every eye—

Would she thus hear him doomed to die!

She stood, I said, all pale and still,

The living cause of Hugo's ill:

Her eyes unmoved, but full and wide,

Not once had turned to either side—

Nor once did those sweet eyelids close,

330

Or shade the glance o'er which they rose,

But round their orbs of deepest blue

The circling white dilated grew—

And there with glassy gaze she stood

As ice were in her curdled blood;

But every now and then a tear<sup>14</sup>

So large and slowly gathered slid

From the long dark fringe of that fair lid,

It was a thing to see, not hear!<sup>15</sup>

And those who saw, it did surprise,

340

Such drops could fall from human eyes.

To speak she thought—the imperfect note

Was choked within her swelling throat,

Yet seemed in that low hollow groan

Her whole heart gushing in the tone.

It ceased—again she thought to speak,

Then burst her voice in one long shriek,

And to the earth she fell like stone

Or statue from its base o'erthrown,

More like a thing that ne'er had life,—

350

A monument of Azo's wife,—

Than her, that living guilty thing,  
Whose every passion was a sting,  
Which urged to guilt, but could not bear  
That guilt's detection and despair.  
But yet she lived—and all too soon  
Recovered from that death-like swoon—  
But scarce to reason—every sense  
Had been o'erstrung by pangs intense;  
And each frail fibre of her brain  
(As bowstrings, when relaxed by rain,  
The erring arrow launch aside)  
Sent forth her thoughts all wild and wide—  
The past a blank, the future black,  
With glimpses of a dreary track,  
Like lightning on the desert path,  
When midnight storms are mustering wrath.  
She feared—she felt that something ill  
Lay on her soul, so deep and chill;  
That there was sin and shame she knew,  
That some one was to die—but who?  
She had forgotten:—did she breathe?  
Could this be still the earth beneath,  
The sky above, and men around;  
Or were they fiends who now so frowned  
On one, before whose eyes each eye  
Till then had smiled in sympathy?  
All was confused and undefined

360

370

To her all-jarred and wandering mind;

A chaos of wild hopes and fears:

380

And now in laughter, now in tears,

But madly still in each extreme,

She strove with that convulsive dream;

For so it seemed on her to break:

Oh! vainly must she strive to wake!

XV.

The Convent bells are ringing,

But mournfully and slow;

In the grey square turret swinging,

With a deep sound, to and fro.

Heavily to the heart they go!

390

Hark! the hymn is singing—

The song for the dead below,

Or the living who shortly shall be so!

For a departed being's soul

The death-hymn peals and the hollow bells knoll:<sup>16</sup>

He is near his mortal goal;

Kneeling at the Friar's knee,

Sad to hear, and piteous to see—

Kneeling on the bare cold ground.

With the block before and the guards around;

400

And the headsman with his bare arm ready,

That the blow may be both swift and steady,

Feels if the axe be sharp and true

Since he set its edge anew:<sup>17</sup>

While the crowd in a speechless circle gather  
To see the Son fall by the doom of the Father!

XVI.

It is a lovely hour as yet

Before the summer sun shall set,  
Which rose upon that heavy day,  
And mock'd it with his steadiest ray;

410

And his evening beams are shed  
Full on Hugo's fated head,

As his last confession pouring  
To the monk, his doom deploring  
In penitential holiness,

He bends to hear his accents bless  
With absolution such as may  
Wipe our mortal stains away.

That high sun on his head did glisten

As he there did bow and listen,

420

And the rings of chestnut hair  
Curled half down his neck so bare;  
But brighter still the beam was thrown  
Upon the axe which near him shone  
With a clear and ghastly glitter—  
Oh! that parting hour was bitter!

Even the stern stood chilled with awe:  
Dark the crime, and just the law—

Yet they shuddered as they saw.

XVII.

The parting prayers are said and over 430  
Of that false son, and daring lover!  
His beads and sins are all recounted,  
His hours to their last minute mounted;  
His mantling cloak before was stripped,  
His bright brown locks must now be clipped;  
'Tis done—all closely are they shorn;  
The vest which till this moment worn—  
The scarf which Parisina gave—  
Must not adorn him to the grave.  
Even that must now be thrown aside, 440  
And o'er his eyes the kerchief tied;  
But no—that last indignity  
Shall ne'er approach his haughty eye.  
All feelings seemingly subdued,  
In deep disdain were half renewed,  
When headsman's hands prepared to bind  
Those eyes which would not brook such blind,  
As if they dared not look on death.  
“No—yours my forfeit blood and breath;  
These hands are chained, but let me die 450  
At least with an unshackled eye—  
Strike:”—and as the word he said,  
Upon the block he bowed his head;

These the last accents Hugo spoke:

“Strike”—and flashing fell the stroke—

Rolled the head—and, gushing, sunk

Back the stained and heaving trunk,

In the dust, which each deep vein

Slaked with its ensanguined rain;

His eyes and lips a moment quiver,

460

Convulsed and quick—then fix for ever.

He died, as erring man should die,

Without display, without parade;

Meekly had he bowed and prayed,

As not disdainingly priestly aid,

Nor desperate of all hope on high.

And while before the Prior kneeling,

His heart was weaned from earthly feeling;

His wrathful Sire—his Paramour—

What were they in such an hour?

470

No more reproach,—no more despair,—

No thought but Heaven,—no word but prayer—

Save the few which from him broke,

When, bared to meet the headsman's stroke,

He claimed to die with eyes unbound,

His sole adieu to those around.

XVIII.

Still as the lips that closed in death,

Each gazer's bosom held his breath:

But yet, afar, from man to man,  
A cold electric<sup>18</sup> shiver ran, 480  
As down the deadly blow descended  
On him whose life and love thus ended;  
And, with a hushing sound compressed,  
A sigh shrunk back on every breast;  
But no more thrilling noise rose there,  
    Beyond the blow that to the block  
    Pierced through with forced and sullen shock,  
Save one:—what cleaves the silent air  
So madly shrill, so passing wild?  
That, as a mother's o'er her child, 490  
Done to death by sudden blow,  
To the sky these accents go,  
Like a soul's in endless woe.  
Through Azo's palace-lattice driven,  
That horrid voice ascends to heaven,  
And every eye is turned thereon;  
But sound and sight alike are gone!  
It was a woman's shriek—and ne'er  
In madlier accents rose despair;  
And those who heard it, as it past, 500  
In mercy wished it were the last.

XIX.

Hugo is fallen; and, from that hour,  
No more in palace, hall, or bower,

Was Parisina heard or seen:  
Her name—as if she ne'er had been—  
Was banished from each lip and ear,  
Like words of wantonness or fear;  
And from Prince Azo's voice, by none  
Was mention heard of wife or son;  
No tomb—no memory had they;  
Theirs was unconsecrated clay—  
At least the Knight's who died that day.

510

But Parisina's fate lies hid  
Like dust beneath the coffin lid:  
Whether in convent she abode,  
And won to heaven her dreary road,  
By blighted and remorseful years  
Of scourge, and fast, and sleepless tears;  
Or if she fell by bowl or steel,  
For that dark love she dared to feel:  
Or if, upon the moment smote,  
She died by tortures less remote,  
Like him she saw upon the block  
With heart that shared the headsman's shock,  
In quickened brokenness that came,  
In pity o'er her shattered frame,  
None knew—and none can ever know:  
But whatso'er its end below,  
Her life began and closed in woe!

520

And Azo found another bride, 530  
 And goodly sons grew by his side;  
 But none so lovely and so brave  
 As him who withered in the grave;<sup>19</sup>  
 Or if they were—on his cold eye  
 Their growth but glanced unheeded by,  
 Or noticed with a smothered sigh.  
 But never tear his cheek descended,  
 And never smile his brow unbended;  
 And o'er that fair broad brow were wrought  
 The intersected lines of thought; 540  
 Those furrows which the burning share  
 Of Sorrow ploughs untimely there;  
 Scars of the lacerating mind  
 Which the Soul's war doth leave behind.<sup>20</sup>  
 He was past all mirth or woe:  
 Nothing more remained below  
 But sleepless nights and heavy days,  
 A mind all dead to scorn or praise,  
 A heart which shunned itself—and yet  
 That would not yield, nor could forget, 550  
 Which, when it least appeared to melt,  
 Intensely thought—intensely felt:  
 The deepest ice which ever froze  
 Can only o'er the surface close;

The living stream lies quick below,  
And flows, and cannot cease to flow.<sup>21</sup>  
Still was his sealed-up bosom haunted  
By thoughts which Nature hath implanted;  
Too deeply rooted thence to vanish,  
Howe'er our stifled tears we banish;  
When struggling as they rise to start,  
We check those waters of the heart,  
They are not dried—those tears unshed  
But flow back to the fountain head,  
And resting in their spring more pure,  
For ever in its depth endure,  
Unseen—unwept—but uncongealed,  
And cherished most where least revealed.

560

With inward starts of feeling left,  
To throb o'er those of life bereft,  
Without the power to fill again  
The desert gap which made his pain;  
Without the hope to meet them where  
United souls shall gladness share;  
With all the consciousness that he  
Had only passed a just decree;  
That they had wrought their doom of ill;  
Yet Azo's age was wretched still.

570

The tainted branches of the tree,  
If lopped with care, a strength may give,  
By which the rest shall bloom and live

580

All greenly fresh and wildly free:  
But if the lightning, in its wrath,  
The waving boughs with fury scathe,  
The massy trunk the ruin feels,  
And never more a leaf reveals.

<sup>2</sup> "This turned out a calamitous year for the people of Ferrara, for there occurred a very tragical event in the court of their sovereign. Our annals, both printed and in manuscript, with the exception of the unpolished and negligent work of Sardi, and one other, have given the following relation of it,—from which, however, are rejected many details, and especially the narrative of Bandelli, who wrote a century afterwards, and who does not accord with the contemporary historians.

"By the above-mentioned Stella dell' Assassino, the Marquis, in the year 1405, had a son called Ugo, a beautiful and ingenuous youth. Parisina Malatesta, second wife of Niccolo, like the generality of step-mothers, treated him with little kindness, to the infinite regret of the Marquis, who regarded him with fond partiality. One day she asked leave of her husband to undertake a certain journey, to which he consented, but upon condition that Ugo should bear her company; for he hoped by these means to induce her, in the end, to lay aside the obstinate aversion which she had conceived against him. And indeed his intent was accomplished but too well, since, during the journey, she not only divested herself of all her hatred, but fell into the opposite extreme. After their return, the Marquis had no longer any occasion to renew his former reproofs. It happened one day that a servant of the Marquis, named Zoese, or, as some call him, Giorgio, passing before the apartments of Parisina, saw going out from them one of her chamber-maids, all terrified and in tears. Asking the reason, she told him that her mistress, for some slight offence, had been beating her; and, giving vent to her rage, she added, that she could easily be revenged, if she chose to make known the criminal familiarity which subsisted between Parisina and her step-son. The servant took note of the words, and related them to his master. He was astounded thereat, but, scarcely believing his ears, he assured himself of the fact, alas! too clearly, on the 18th of May, by looking through a hole made in the ceiling of his wife's chamber. Instantly he broke into a furious rage, and arrested both of them, together with Aldobrandino Rangoni, of Modena, her gentleman, and also, as some say, two of the women of her chamber, as abettors of this sinful act. He ordered them to be brought to a hasty trial, desiring the judges to pronounce sentence, in the accustomed forms, upon the culprits. This sentence was death. Some there were that bestirred themselves in favour of the delinquents, and, amongst others, Ugoccion Contrario, who was all-powerful with Niccolo, and also his aged and much deserving minister Alberto dal

Sale. Both of these, their tears flowing down their cheeks, and upon their knees, implored him for mercy; adducing whatever reasons they could suggest for sparing the offenders, besides those motives of honour and decency which might persuade him to conceal from the public so scandalous a deed. But his rage made him inflexible, and, on the instant, he commanded that the sentence should be put in execution.

"It was, then, in the prisons of the castle, and exactly in those frightful dungeons which are seen at this day beneath the chamber called the Aurora, at the foot of the Lion's tower, at the top of the street Giovecca, that on the night of the 21st of May were beheaded, first, Ugo, and afterwards Parisina. Zoese, he that accused her, conducted the latter under his arm to the place of punishment. She, all along, fancied that she was to be thrown into a pit, and asked at every step, whether she was yet come to the spot? She was told that her punishment was the axe. She enquired what was become of Ugo, and received for answer, that he was already dead; at which, sighing grievously, she exclaimed, 'Now, then, I wish not myself to live;' and, being come to the block, she stripped herself, with her own hands, of all her ornaments, and, wrapping a cloth round her head, submitted to the fatal stroke, which terminated the cruel scene. The same was done with Rangoni, who, together with the others, according to two calendars in the library of St. Francesco, was buried in the cemetery of that convent. Nothing else is known respecting the women.

"The Marquis kept watch the whole of that dreadful night, and, as he was walking backwards and forwards, enquired of the captain of the castle if Ugo was dead yet? who answered him, Yes. He then gave himself up to the most desperate lamentations, exclaiming, 'Oh! that I too were dead, since I have been hurried on to resolve thus against my own Ugo!' And then gnawing with his teeth a cane which he had in his hand, he passed the rest of the night in sighs and in tears, calling frequently upon his own dear Ugo. On the following day, calling to mind that it would be necessary to make public his justification, seeing that the transaction could not be kept secret, he ordered the narrative to be drawn out upon paper, and sent it to all the courts of Italy.

"On receiving this advice, the Doge of Venice, Francesco Foscari, gave orders, but without publishing his reasons, that stop should be put to the preparations for a tournament, which, under the auspices of the Marquis, and at the expense of the city of Padua, was about to take place, in the square of St. Mark, in order to celebrate his advancement to the ducal chair.

"The Marquis, in addition to what he had already done, from some unaccountable burst of vengeance, commanded that as many of the married women as were well known to him to be faithless, like his Parisina, should, like her, be beheaded. Amongst others, Barberina, or, as some call her, Laodamia Romei, wife of the court judge, underwent this sentence, at the usual place of execution; that is to say, in the quarter of St. Giacomo, opposite the present fortress, beyond St. Paul's. It cannot be told how strange appeared this proceeding in a prince, who, considering his own disposition, should, as it seemed, have been in such cases most indulgent. Some, however, there were who did not fail to commend him." [*Memorie per la Storia di Ferrara*, Raccolte da Antonio Frizzi, 1793, iii. 408–410. See, too, *Celebri Famiglie Italiane*, by Conte Pompeo Litta, 1832, Fasc. xxvi. Part III. vol. ii.]

<sup>3</sup> [The revise of *Parisina* is endorsed in Murray's handwriting, "Given to me by Lord Byron at his house, Saturday, January 13, 1816."]

<sup>4</sup> The lines contained in this section were printed as set to music some time since, but belonged to the poem where they now appear; the greater part of which was composed prior to *Lara*, and other compositions since published. [Note to *Siege, etc.*, First Edition, 1816.]

<sup>5</sup> [Leigh Hunt, in his *Autobiography* (1860, p. 252), says, "I had the pleasure of supplying my friendly critic, Lord Byron, with a point for his *Parisina* (the incident of the heroine talking in her sleep)."

Putting Lady Macbeth out of the question, the situation may be traced to a passage in Henry Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigné* (1777, ii. 101: "Montauban to Segarva," Letter xxxv.):—

"I was last night abroad at supper; Julia was a-bed before my return. I found her lute lying on the table, and a music-book open by it. I could perceive the marks of tears shed on the paper, and the air was such as might encourage their falling. Sleep, however, had overcome her sadness, and she did not awake when I opened the curtain to look on her. When I had stood some moments, I heard her sigh strongly through her sleep, and presently she muttered some words, I know not of what import. I had sometimes heard her do so before, without regarding it much; but there was something that roused my attention now. I listened; she sighed again, and again spoke a few broken words. At last I heard her plainly pronounce the name Savillon two or three times, and each time it was accompanied with sighs so deep that her heart seemed bursting as it heaved then."

<sup>6</sup> [Compare *Christabel*, Part II. lines 408, 409—

"Alas! they had been friends in youth;

But whispering tongues can poison truth."]

<sup>7</sup> [Compare the famous eulogy of Marie Antoinette, in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France, in a Letter intended to have been sent to a Gentleman in Paris*, London, 1790, pp. 112, 113—

"It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles. . . . Little did I dream . . . that I should have lived to see such disasters fall upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult."

<sup>8</sup> [Lines 175–182, which are in Byron's handwriting, were added to the Copy.]

<sup>9</sup> [The meaning is plain, but the construction is involved. The contrast is between the blood of foes, which Hugo has shed for Azo, and Hugo's own blood, which Azo is about to shed on the scaffold. But this is one of Byron's incurious infelicities.]

<sup>10</sup> Haught—haughty. "Away, *haught* man, thou art insulting me."—Shakespeare [*Richard II.*, act iv. sc. i, line 254—"No lord of thine, thou haught insulting man."]

<sup>11</sup> [Lines 304, 305, and lines 310–317 are not in the Copy. They were inserted by Byron in the Revise.]

<sup>12</sup> [A writer in the *Critical Review* (February, 1816, vol. iii. p. 151) holds this couplet up to derision. "Too" is a weak ending, and, orally at least, ambiguous.]

<sup>13</sup> ["I sent for *Marmion*, . . . because it occurred to me there might be a resemblance between part of *Parisina* and a similar scene in Canto 2d. of *Marmion*. I fear there is, though I never thought of it before, and could hardly wish to imitate that which is inimitable. . . . I had completed the story on the passage from Gibbon, which, in fact, leads to a like scene naturally, without a thought of the kind; but it comes upon me not very comfortably."—Letter to Murray, February 3, 1816 (*Letters*, 1899, iii. 260). The scene in *Marmion* is the one where Constance de Beverley appears before the conclave—

"Her look composed, and steady eye,  
Bespoke a matchless constancy;  
And there she stood so calm and pale,  
That, but her breathing did not fail,  
And motion slight of eye and head,  
And of her bosom, warranted  
That neither sense nor pulse she lacks,  
You must have thought a form of wax,  
Wrought to the very life, was there—  
So still she was, so pale, so fair."

CANTO II. STANZA XXI. LINES 5–14.]

<sup>14</sup> ["I admire the fabrication of the 'big Tear,' which is very fine—much larger, by the way, than Shakespeare's."—Letter of John Murray to Lord Byron (*Memoir of John Murray*, 1891, i. 354).]

<sup>15</sup> [Compare *Christabel*, Part I. line 253—"A sight to dream of, not to tell!"]

<sup>16</sup> [For the peculiar use of "knoll" as a verb, compare *Childe Harold*, Canto III. stanza xcvi. line 5; and *Werner*, act iii. sc. 3.]

<sup>17</sup> [Lines 401–404, which are in Byron's handwriting, were added to the Copy.]

<sup>18</sup> [For the use of "electric" as a metaphor, compare Coleridge's *Songs of the Pixies*, v. lines 59, 60—

"The electric flash, that from the melting eye  
Darts the fond question and the soft reply."]

<sup>19</sup> [Here, again, Byron is *super grammaticam*. The comparison is between Hugo and "goodly sons," not between Hugo and "bride" in the preceding line.]

<sup>20</sup> [Lines 539–544 are not in the Copy, but were inserted in the Revise.]

<sup>21</sup> [Lines 551–556 are not in the Copy, but were inserted in the Revise.]

