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## INTRODUCTION TO *THE PRISONER OF CHILLON*.

The *Prisoner of Chillon*, says Moore (*Life*, p. 320), was written at Ouchy, near Lausanne, where Byron and Shelley “were detained two days in a small inn [Hôtel de l’Ancre, now d’Angleterre] by the weather.” Byron’s letter to Murray, dated June 27 (but? 28), 1816, does not precisely tally with Shelley’s journal contained in a letter to Peacock, July 12, 1816 (*Prose Works of P. B. Shelley*, 1880, ii. 171, sq.); but, if Shelley’s first date, June 23, is correct, it follows that the two poets visited the Castle of Chillon on Wednesday, June 26, reached Ouchy on Thursday, June 27, and began their homeward voyage on Saturday, June 29 (Shelley misdates it June 30). On this reckoning the *Prisoner of Chillon* was begun and finished between Thursday, June 27, and Saturday, June 29, 1816. Whenever or wherever begun, it was completed by July 10 (see *Memoir of John Murray*, 1891, i. 364), and was ready for transmission to England by July 25. The MS., in Claire’s handwriting, was placed in Murray’s hands on October 11, and the poem, with seven others, was published December 5, 1816.

In a final note to the *Prisoner of Chillon* (First Edition, 1816, p. 59), Byron confesses that when “the foregoing poem was composed he knew too little of the history of Bonnivard to do justice to his courage and virtues,” and appends as a note to the “Sonnet on Chillon,” “some account of his life . . . furnished by the kindness of a citizen of that Republic,” i.e. Geneva. The note, which is now entitled “Advertisement,” is taken bodily from the pages of a work published in 1786 by the Swiss naturalist, Jean Senebier, who died in 1809. It was not Byron’s way to invent imaginary authorities, but rather to give his references with some pride and particularity, and it is possible that this unacknowledged and hitherto unverified “account” was supplied by some literary acquaintance, who failed to explain that his information was common property. Be that as it may, Senebier’s prose is in some respects as unhistorical as Byron’s verse, and stands in need of some corrections and additions.

François Bonivard (there is no contemporary authority for “Bonnivard”) was born in 1493. In early youth (1510) he became by inheritance Prior of St. Victor, a monastery outside the walls of Geneva, and on reaching manhood (1514) he accepted the office and the benefice, “la dignité ecclésiastique de Prieur et de la

Seigneurie temporelle de St. Victor.” A lover of independence, a child of the later Renaissance, in a word, a Genevese, he threw in his lot with a band of ardent reformers and patriots, who were conspiring to shake off the yoke of Duke Charles III. of Savoy, and convert the city into a republic. Here is his own testimony: “Dès que j’eus commencé de lire l’histoire des nations, je me sentis entraîné par un goût prononcé pour les Républiques dont j’épousai toujours les intérêts.” Hence, in a great measure, the unrelenting enmity of the duke, who not only ousted him from his priory, but caused him to be shut up for two years at Grolée, Gex, and Belley, and again, after he had been liberated on a second occasion, ordered him, a safe conduct notwithstanding, to be seized and confined in the Castle of Chillon. Here he remained from 1530 to February 1, 1536, when he was released by the Bernese.

For the first two years he was lodged in a room near the governor’s quarters, and was fairly comfortable; but a day came when the duke paid a visit to Chillon; and “then,” he writes, “the captain thrust me into a cell lower than the lake, where I lived four years. I know not whether he did it by the duke’s orders or of his own accord; but sure it is that I had so much leisure for walking, that I wore in the rock which was the pavement a track or little path, as it had been made with a hammer” (*Chroniques des Liges* de Stumpf, addition de Bonivard).

After he had been liberated, “par la grace de Dieu donnée à Mess<sup>rs</sup> de Berne,” he returned to Geneva, and was made a member of the Council of the State, and awarded a house and a pension of two hundred crowns a year. A long life was before him, which he proceeded to spend in characteristic fashion, finely and honourably as scholar, author, and reformer, but with little self-regard or self-respect as a private citizen. He was married no less than four times, and not one of these alliances was altogether satisfactory or creditable. Determined “to warm both hands before the fire of life,” he was prone to ignore the prejudices and even the decencies of his fellow-citizens, now incurring their displeasure, and now again, as one who had greatly testified for truth and freedom, being taken back into favour and forgiven. There was a deal of human nature in Bonivard, with the result that, at times, conduct fell short of pretension and principle. Estimates of his character differ widely. From the standpoint of Catholic orthodoxy, “C’était un fort mauvais sujet et un plus mauvais prêtre;” and even his captivity, infamous as it was, “ne peut rendre Bonivard intéressant” (*Notices Généalogiques sur les Familles Genevoises*, par J. A. Galiffe, 1836, iii. 67, sq.); whilst an advocate and champion, the author of the *Preface* to *Les Chroniques de Genève* par François de

Bonnivard, 1831, tom. i. pt. i. p. xli., avows that “aucun homme n’a fait preuve d’un plus beau caractère, d’un plus parfait désintéressement que l’illustre Prieur de St. Victor.” Like other great men, he may have been guilty of “quelques égaremens du coeur, quelques concessions passagères aux dévices des sens,” but “Peu importe à la postérité les irrégularités de leur vie privée” (p. xlvi.).

But whatever may be the final verdict with regard to the morals, there can be no question as to the intellectual powers of the “Prisoner of Chillon.” The publication of various MS. tracts, e.g. *Avis et Devis de l’ancienne et nouvelle Police de Genève*, 1865; *Avis et Devis des Lengnes*, etc., 1865, which were edited by the late J. J. Chaponnière, and, after his death, by M. Gustave Revilliod, has placed his reputation as historian, satirist, philosopher, beyond doubt or cavil. One quotation must suffice. He is contrasting the Protestants with the Catholics (*Avis et Devis de la Source de Lidolatrie*, Geneva, 1856, p. 159): “Et nous disons que les prebstres rongent les mortz et est vray; mais nous faisons bien pys, car nous rongeons les vifz. Quel profit revient aux paveures du dommage des prebstres? Nous nous ventons toutes les deux parties de prescher Christ cruciffie et disons vray, car nous le laissons cruciffie et nud en l’arbre de la croix, et jouons a beaux dez au pied dicelle croix, pour scavoir qui haura sa robe.”

For Bonivard’s account of his second imprisonment, see *Les Chroniques de Genève*, tom. ii. part ii. pp. 571–577; see, too, *Notice sur François Bonivard*, . . . par Le Docteur J. J. Chaponnière, Mémoires et Documents Publiés, par La Société d’Histoire, etc., de Genève, 1845, iv. 137–245; *Chillon Etude Historique*, par L. Vulliemin, Lausanne, 1851; *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Seconde Période, vol. 82, Août, 1869, pp. 682–709; “True Story of the Prisoner of Chillon,” *Nineteenth Century*, May, 1900, No. 279, pp. 821–829, by A. van Amstel (Johannes Christiaan Neuman).

*The Prisoner of Chillon* was reviewed (together with the Third Canto of *Childe Harold*) by Sir Walter Scott (*Quarterly Review*, No. xxxi., October, 1816), and by Jeffrey (*Edinburgh Review*, No. liv., December, 1816).

With the exception of the *Eclectic* (March, 1817, N.S., vol. vii. pp. 298–304), the lesser reviews were unfavourable. For instance, the *Critical Review* (December, 1816, Series V. vol. iv. pp. 567–581) detected the direct but unacknowledged influence of Wordsworth on thought and style; and the *Portfolio* (No. vi. pp. 121–128), in an elaborate skit, entitled “Literary Frauds,” assumed,

and affected to prove, that the entire poem was a forgery, and belonged to the same category as *The Right Honourable Lord Byron's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, etc.*

For extracts from these and other reviews, see Kölbing, *Prisoner of Chillon, and Other Poems*, Weimar, 1896, excursus i. pp. 3–55.



## SONNET ON CHILLON

Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!<sup>1</sup>  
    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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> {7}[In the first draft, the sonnet opens thus—

    "Belovéd Goddess of the chainless mind!  
    Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art,  
    Thy palace is within the Freeman's heart,  
Whose soul the love of thee alone can bind;  
And when thy sons to fetters are consign'd—  
    To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,  
Thy joy is with them still, and unconfined,  
    Their country conquers with their martyrdom."



Ed. 1832.]

2 [Compare—

“I appeal from her [sc. Florence] to Thee.”

*PROPH. OF DANTE, CANTO I. LINE 125.*]

## ADVERTISEMENT

When this poem\* was composed, I was not sufficiently aware of the history of Bonnivard, or I should have endeavoured to dignify the subject by an attempt to celebrate his courage and his virtues. With some account of his life I have been furnished, by the kindness of a citizen of that republic, which is still proud of the memory of a man worthy of the best age of ancient freedom:—

“François De Bonnivard, fils de Louis De Bonnivard, originaire de Seyssel et Seigneur de Lunes, naquit en 1496. Il fit ses études à Turin: en 1510 Jean Aimé de Bonnivard, son oncle, lui résigna le Prieuré de St. Victor, qui aboutissoit aux murs de Genève, et qui formait un bénéfice considérable. . . .

“Ce grand homme—(Bonnivard mérite ce litre par la force de son âme, la droiture de son coeur, la noblesse de ses intentions, la sagesse de ses conseils, le courage de ses démarches, l’étendue de ses connaissances, et la vivacité de son esprit),—ce grand homme, qui excitera l’admiration de tous ceux qu’une vertu héroïque peut encore émouvoir, inspirera encore la plus vive reconnaissance dans les coeurs des Genevois qui aiment Genève. Bonnivard en fut toujours un des plus fermes appuis: pour assurer la liberté de notre République, il ne craignit pas de perdre souvent la sienne; il oublia son repos; il méprisa ses richesses; il ne négligea rien pour affermir le bonheur d’une patrie qu’il honora de son choix: dès ce moment il la chérit comme le plus zélé de ses citoyens; il la servit avec l’intrépidité d’un héros, et il écrivit son Histoire avec la naïveté d’un philosophe et la chaleur d’un patriote.

“Il dit dans le commencement de son Histoire de Genève, que, *dès qu’il eut commencé de lire l’histoire des nations, il se sentit entraîné par son goût pour les Républiques, dont il épousa toujours les intérêts: c’est ce goût pour la liberté qui lui fit sans doute adopter Genève pour sa patrie. . . .*

“Bonnivard, encore jeune, s’annonça hautement comme le défenseur de Genève contre le Duc de Savoye et l’Evêque. . . .

“En 1519, Bonnivard devient le martyr de sa patrie: Le Duc de Savoye étant entré dans Genève avec cinq cent hommes, Bonnivard craint le ressentiment du Duc; il voulut se retirer à Fribourg pour en éviter les suites; mais il fut trahi par

deux hommes qui l'accompagnaient, et conduit par ordre du Prince à Grolée, où il resta prisonnier pendant deux ans. Bonnivard était malheureux dans ses voyages: comme ses malheurs n'avaient point ralenti son zèle pour Genève, il était toujours un ennemi redoutable pour ceux qui la menaçaient, et par conséquent il devait être exposé à leurs coups. Il fut rencontré en 1530 sur le Jura par des voleurs, qui le dépouillèrent, et qui le mirent encore entre les mains du Duc de Savoie: ce Prince le fit enfermer dans le Château de Chillon, où il resta sans être interrogé jusques en 1536; il fut alors delivré par les Bernois, qui s'emparèrent du Pays-deVaud.

“Bonnivard, en sortant de sa captivité, eut le plaisir de trouver Genève libre et réformée: la République s'empessa de lui témoigner sa reconnaissance, et de le dédommager des maux qu'il avoit soufferts; elle le reçut Bourgeois de la ville au mois de Juin, 1536; elle lui donna la maison habitée autrefois par le Vicaire-Général, et elle lui assigna une pension de deux cent écus d'or tant qu'il séjournerait à Genève. Il fut admis dans le Conseil des Deux-Cent en 1537.

“Bonnivard n'a pas fini d'être utile: après avoir travaillé à rendre Genève libre, il réussit à la rendre tolérante. Bonnivard engagea le Conseil à accorder [aux ecclésiastiques et aux paysans] un tems suffisant pour examiner les propositions qu'on leur faisait; il réussit par sa douceur: on prêche toujours le Christianisme avec succès quand on le prêche avec charité. . . .

“Bonnivard fut savant: ses manuscrits, qui sont dans la bibliothèque publique, prouvent qu'il avait bien lu les auteurs classiques Latins, et qu'il avait approfondi la théologie et l'histoire. Ce grand homme aimait les sciences, et il croyait qu'elles pouvaient faire la gloire de Genève; aussi il ne négligea rien pour les fixer dans cette ville naissante; en 1551 il donna sa bibliothèque au public; elle fut le commencement de notre bibliothèque publique; et ces livres sont en partie les rares et belles éditions du quinzième siècle qu'on voit dans notre collection. Enfin, pendant la même année, ce bon patriote institua la République son héritière, à condition qu'elle emploierait ses biens à entretenir le collège dont on projetait la fondation.

“Il parait que Bonnivard mourut en 1570; mais on ne peut l'assurer, parcequ'il y a une lacune dans le Nécrologe depuis le mois de Juillet, 1570, jusques en 1571.”—[*Histoire Littéraire de Genève*, par Jean Senebier (1741–1809), 1786, i. 131–137.]

\* *When the foregoing. . . . Some account of his life will be found in a note appended to the Sonnet on Chillon, with which I have been furnished, etc.—[Notes, The Prisoner of Chillon, etc., 1816, p. 59.]*



# THE PRISONER OF CHILLON

1.

My hair is grey, but not with years,

Nor grew it white

In a single night,<sup>3</sup>

As men's have grown from sudden fears:

My limbs are bowed, though not with toil,

But rusted with a vile repose,<sup>b</sup>

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,<sup>4</sup> 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

In darkness found a dwelling place;

We were seven—who now are one,<sup>5</sup>

Six in youth, and one in age,

Finished as they had begun,

Proud of Persecution's rage;<sup>c</sup>

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,  
Of whom this wreck is left the last.

2.

There are seven pillars of Gothic mould,<sup>6</sup>  
In Chillon's dungeons deep and old,  
There are seven columns, massy and grey,  
Dim with a dull imprisoned ray,  
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:<sup>7</sup>  
And in each pillar there is a ring,<sup>8</sup>

30

    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,  
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  
When my last brother drooped and died,  
And I lay living by his side.

40

3.

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,<sup>d</sup>

'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,

As they of yore were wont to be:

It might be fancy—but to me

They never sounded like our own.

4.

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—  
    For him my soul was sorely moved:  
And truly might it be distressed  
To see such bird in such a nest;<sup>9</sup>  
For he was beautiful as day—

    (When day was beautiful to me  
    As to young eagles, being free)—  
    A polar day, which will not see<sup>10</sup>  
A sunset till its summer's gone,  
    Its sleepless summer of long light,  
The snow-clad offspring of the sun:  
    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  
Which he abhorred to view below.

5.

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,  
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,

And fettered feet the worst of ills.

6.

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,<sup>11</sup>

Which round about the wave inthralls:

A double dungeon wall and wave

Have made—and like a living grave.

Below the surface of the lake<sup>12</sup>

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

120

And wanton in the happy sky;

And then the very rock hath rocked,

And I have felt it shake, unshocked,<sup>13</sup>

Because I could have smiled to see  
The death that would have set me free.

7.

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 hunter's fare,  
And for the like had little care:  
The milk drawn from the mountain goat  
Was changed for water from the moat,  
Our bread was such as captives' tears  
Have moistened many a thousand years,  
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  
Which in a palace had grown cold,  
Had his free breathing been denied  
The range of the steep mountain's side;<sup>14</sup>  
But why delay the truth?—he died.<sup>e</sup>  
I saw, and could not hold his head,  
Nor reach his dying hand—nor dead,—  
Though hard I strove, but strove in vain,  
To rend and gnash my bonds in twain.<sup>f</sup>

130

140

He died—and they unlocked his chain,  
And scooped for him a shallow grave<sup>15</sup>  
Even from the cold earth of our cave.

150

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,<sup>16</sup>  
That even in death his freeborn 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  
The being we so much did love;  
His empty chain above it leant,  
Such Murder's fitting monument!

160

8.

But he, the favourite and the flower,  
Most cherished since his natal hour,  
His mother's image in fair face,  
The infant love of all his race,  
His martyred father's dearest thought,<sup>17</sup>  
My latest care, for whom I sought  
To hoard my life, that his might be  
Less wretched now, and one day free;  
He, too, who yet had held untired  
A spirit natural or inspired—

170

He, too, was struck, and day by day  
Was withered on the stalk away.<sup>18</sup>  
Oh, God! it is a fearful thing  
To see the human soul take wing  
In any shape, in any mood:<sup>19</sup>  
I've seen it rushing forth in blood,  
I've seen it on the breaking ocean  
Strive with a swoln 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:  
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  
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;  
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

180

190

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;  
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,  
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 sole, the dearest link  
Between me and the eternal brink,  
Which bound me to my failing race,  
Was broken in this fatal place.

210

One on the earth, and one beneath—  
My brothers—both had ceased to breathe:  
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  
That what we love shall ne'er be so.

220

I know not why

I could not die,<sup>20</sup>

I had no earthly hope—but faith,  
And that forbade a selfish death.

230

9.

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—

Among the stones I stood a stone,<sup>21</sup>

And was, scarce conscious what I wist,

As shrubless crags within the mist;

For all was blank, and bleak, and grey;

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—

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

10.

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  
Ran 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;  
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  
That bird was perched, as fond and tame,  
And tamer than upon the tree;  
A lovely bird, with azure wings,<sup>22</sup>  
And song that said a thousand things,  
And seemed to say them all for me!

260

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,<sup>23</sup>  
And it was come to love me when  
None lived to love me so again,  
And cheering from my dungeon's brink,  
Had brought me back to feel and think.

270



I know not if it late were free,  
Or broke its cage to perch on mine,  
But knowing well captivity,  
Sweet bird! I could not wish for thine!  
Or if it were, in wingéd guise,  
A visitant from Paradise;  
For—Heaven forgive that thought! the while  
Which made me both to weep and smile—  
I sometimes deemed that it might be  
My brother's soul come down to me;<sup>24</sup>  
But then at last away it flew,  
And then 'twas mortal well I knew,  
For he would never thus have flown—  
And left me twice so doubly lone,—  
Lone—as the corse within its shroud,  
Lone—as a solitary cloud,<sup>25</sup>  
A single cloud on a sunny day,  
While all the rest of heaven is clear,  
A frown upon the atmosphere,  
That hath no business to appear<sup>26</sup>  
When skies are blue, and earth is gay.

280

290

11.

A kind of change came in my fate,  
My keepers grew compassionate;  
I know not what had made them so,  
They were inured to sights of woe,

300

But so it was:—my broken chain  
With links unfastened did remain,  
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,  
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,  
My breath came gaspingly and thick,  
And my crushed heart felt blind and sick.

310

12.

I made a footing in the wall,  
It was not therefrom to escape,  
For I had buried one and all,  
Who loved me in a human shape;  
And the whole earth would henceforth be  
A wider prison unto me:<sup>27</sup>  
No child—no sire—no kin had I,  
No partner in my misery;  
I thought of this, and I was glad,  
For thought of them had made me mad;  
But I was curious to ascend

320

To my barred windows, and to bend  
Once more, upon the mountains high,  
The quiet of a loving eye.<sup>28</sup>

330

13.

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,<sup>g</sup>  
And the blue Rhone in fullest flow;<sup>29</sup>  
I heard the torrents leap and gush  
O'er channelled rock and broken bush;  
I saw the white-walled distant town,<sup>30</sup>  
And whiter sails go skimming down;  
And then there was a little isle,<sup>31</sup>  
Which in my very face did smile,

340

    The only one in view;  
A small green isle, it seemed no more,<sup>32</sup>  
Scarce broader than my dungeon floor,  
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;<sup>33</sup>  
The eagle rode the rising blast,

Methought he never flew so fast  
As then to me he seemed to fly;  
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  
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 opprest,  
Had almost need of such a rest.

360

14.

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;  
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,  
And all my bonds aside were cast,  
These heavy walls to me had grown  
A hermitage—and all my own!<sup>34</sup>

370

And half I felt as they were come  
To tear me from a second home:  
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,  
And I, the monarch of each race,  
Had power to kill—yet, strange to tell!  
In quiet we had learned to dwell;<sup>[h]</sup>  
My very chains and I grew friends,  
So much a long communion tends  
To make us what we are:—even I  
Regained my freedom with a sigh.

380

390

<sup>3</sup> Ludovico Sforza, and others.—The same is asserted of Marie Antoinette's, the wife of Louis the Sixteenth, though not in quite so short a period. Grief is said to have the same effect; to such, and not to fear, this change in *hers* was to be attributed.

[It has been said that the Queen's hair turned grey during the return from Varennes to Paris; but Carlyle (*French Revolution*, 1839, i. 182) notes that as early as May 4, 1789, on the occasion of the assembly of the States-General, "Her hair is already grey with many cares and crosses."

Compare "Thy father's beard is turned white with the news" (Shakespeare, *I Henry IV.*, act ii. sc. 4, line 345); and—

"For deadly fear can time outgo,  
And blanch at once the hair."

*MARMION*, CANTO I. STANZA XXVIII. LINES 19, 20.]

<sup>b</sup> *But with the inward waste of grief.*—[MS.]

<sup>4</sup> [The *N. Engl. Dict.*, art. "Ban," gives this passage as the earliest instance of the use of the verb "to ban" in the sense of "to interdict, to prohibit." Exception was taken to this use of the word in the *Crit. Rev.*, 1817, Series V. vol. iv. p. 571.]

<sup>5</sup> [Compare the epitaph on the monument of Richard Lord Byron, in the chancel of Hucknall-Torkard Church, "Beneath in a vault is interred the body of Richard Lord Byron, who with the rest of his family, being seven brothers," etc. (Elze's *Life of Lord Byron*, p. 4, note 1).

Compare, too, Churchill's *Prophecy of Famine*, lines 391, 392—

"Five brothers there I lost, in manhood's pride,  
Two in the field and three on gibbets died."

The Bonivard of history had but two brothers, Amblard and another.]

<sup>c</sup> *Braving rancour—chains—and rage.*—[MS.]

<sup>6</sup> ["This is really so: the loop-holes that are partly stopped up are now but long crevices or clefts, but Bonivard, from the spot where he was chained, could, perhaps, never get an idea of the loveliness and variety of radiating light which the sunbeam shed at different hours of the day. . . . In the morning this light is of luminous and transparent shining, which the curves of the vaults send back all along the hall. Victor Hugo (*Le Rhin*, . . . Hachette, 1876, I. iii. pp. 123–131) describes this . . . 'Le phénomène de la grotto d'azur s'accomplit dans le souterrain de Chillon, et le lac de Genève n'y réussit pas moins bien que la Méditerranée.' During the afternoon the hall assumes a much deeper and warmer colouring, and the blue transparency of the morning disappears; but at eventide, after the sun has set behind the Jura, the scene changes to the deep glow of fire . . ."—*Guide to the Castle of Chillon*, by A. Naef, architect, 1896, pp, 35, 36.]

<sup>7</sup> [Compare—

"One little marshy spark of flame."

*DEF. TRANS.*, PART I. SC. I.

Kölbing notes six other allusions in Byron's works to the "will-o'-the-wisp," but omits the line in the "Incantation" (*Manfred*, act i. sc. I, line 195)—

"And the wisp on the morass,"

which the Italian translator would have rendered "bundle of straw" (see Letter to Hoppner, February 28, 1818, *Letters*, 1900, iv. 204, note 2, et post p. 92, note 1).]

<sup>8</sup> [This " . . . is not exactly so; the third column does not seem to have ever had a ring, but the traces of these rings are very visible in the two first columns from the entrance, although the rings have been removed; and on the three last we find the rings still riveted on the darkest side of the pillars where they face the rock, so that the unfortunate prisoners chained there were even bereft of light. . . . The fifth column is said to be the one to which Bonivard was chained during four years. Byron's name is carved on the southern side of the third column . . . on the seventh tympanum, at about 1 metre 45 from the lower edge of the shaft." Much has been written for and against the authenticity of this inscription, which, according to M. Naef, the author of *Guide*, was carved by Byron himself, "with an antique ivory-mounted stiletto, which had been discovered in the duke's room."—*Guide, etc.*, pp. 39–42. The inscription was *in situ* as early as August 22, 1820, as

Mr. Richard Edgcumbe points out (*Notes and Queries*, Series V. xi. 487).]

<sup>d</sup> —*pined in heart*.—[Editions 1816–1837.]

<sup>9</sup> [Compare, for similarity of sound—

“Thou tree of covert and of rest  
For this young Bird that is distress.”

*SONG AT THE FEAST OF BROUGHAM CASTLE*, BY W. WORDSWORTH, *WORKS*,  
1889, p. 364.

Compare, too—

“She came into the cave, but it was merely  
To see her bird reposing in his nest.”

*DON JUAN*, CANTO II. STANZA CLXVIII. LINES 3, 4.]

<sup>10</sup> [Compare—

“Those polar summers, *all* sun, and some ice.”

*DON JUAN*, CANTO XII. STANZA LXXII. LINE 8.]

<sup>11</sup> [Ruskin (*Modern Painters*, Part IV. chap. i. sect. 9, “Touching the Grand Style,” 1888, iii. 8, 9) criticizes these five lines 107–111, and points out that, alike in respect of accuracy and inaccuracy of detail, they fulfil the conditions of poetry in contradistinction to history. “Instead,” he concludes, “of finding, as we expected, the poetry distinguished from the history by the omission of details, we find it consisting entirely in the addition of details; and instead of it being characterized by regard only of the invariable, we find its whole power to consist in the clear expression of what is singular and particular!”]

<sup>12</sup> 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 the depth of 800 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. It is by this castle that Rousseau has fixed the catastrophe of his *Héloïse*, in the rescue of one of her children by Julie from the water; the shock of which, and the illness produced by the immersion, is the cause of her death. The château is large, and seen along the lake for a great distance. The walls are white.

[“Le château de Chillon . . . est situé dans le lac sur un rocher qui forme une presqu’île, et autour du quel j’ai vu sonder à plus de cent cinquante brasses qui font près de huit cents pieds, sans trouver le fond. On a creusé dans ce rocher des caves et des cuisines au-dessous du niveau de l’eau, qu’on y introduit, quand on veut, par des robinets. C’est-là que fut détenu six ans prisonnier François Bonnivard . . . homme d’un mérite rare, d’une droiture et d’une fermeté à toute épreuve, ami de la liberté, quoique Savoyard, et tolérant quoique prêtre,” etc. (*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, par J. J. Rousseau, partie vi. Lettre 8, note (1);

*Oeuvres complètes*, 1836, ii. 356, note 1).

With Byron's description of Chillon, compare that of Shelley, contained in a letter to Peacock, dated July 12, 1816 (*Prose Works of P. B. Shelley*, 1880, ii. 171, sq.). The belief or tradition that Bonivard's prison is "below the surface of the lake," for which Shelley as well as Rousseau is responsible, but which Byron only records in verse, may be traced to a statement attributed to Bonivard himself, who says (*Mémoires, etc.*, 1843, iv. 268) that the commandant thrust him "en unes croctes desquelles le fond estoit plus bas que le lac sur lequel Chillon estoit citue." As a matter of fact, "the level [of *les souterrains*] is now three metres higher than the level of the water, and even if we take off the difference arising from the fact that the level of the lake was once much higher, and that the floor of the halls has been raised, still the halls must originally have been built about two metres above the surface of the lake."—*Guide, etc.*, pp. 28, 29.]

<sup>13</sup> [The "real Bonivard" might have indulged in and, perhaps, prided himself on this feeble and irritating *paronomasy*; but nothing can be less in keeping with the bearing and behaviour of the tragic and sententious Bonivard of the legend.]

<sup>14</sup> [Compare—

". . . I'm a forester and breather  
Of the steep mountain-tops."

*WERNER*, ACT IV. SC. 1.]

<sup>e</sup> *But why withhold the blow?—he died.* [MS.]

<sup>f</sup> *To break or bite—.—*[MS.]

<sup>15</sup> [Compare "With the aid of Suleiman's ataghan and my own sabre, we scooped a shallow grave upon the spot which Darvell had indicated" (*A fragment of a Novel by Byron, Letters*, 1899, iii. Appendix IX. p. 452).]

<sup>16</sup> [Compare—

"And to be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain."

*CHRISTABEL*, BY S. T. COLERIDGE, PART II. LINES 412, 413.]

<sup>17</sup> [It is said that his parents handed him over to the care of his uncle, Jean-Aimé Bonivard, when he was still an infant, and it is denied that his father was "literally put to death."]

<sup>18</sup> [Kölbing quotes parallel uses of the same expression in *Werner*, act iv. sc. 1; Churchill's *The Times*, line 341, etc.; but does not give the original—

"But earthlier happy is the rose distill'd,  
Than that which, withering on the virgin-thorn," etc.

*MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, ACT I. SC. I, LINES 76, 77.]

<sup>19</sup> [Compare—

"The first, last look of Death revealed."

*THE GIAOUR*, LINE 89, NOTE 2.



Byron was a connoisseur of the incidents and by-play of "sudden death," so much so that Goethe was under the impression that he had been guilty of a venial murder (see his review of *Manfred* in his paper *Kunst and Alterthum, Letters*, 1901, v. 506, 507). A year after these lines were written, when he was at Rome (Letter to Murray, May 30, 1817), he saw three robbers guillotined, and observed himself and them from a psychological standpoint.

"The ghastly bed of Sin" (lines 182, 183) may be a reminiscence of the death-bed of Lord Falkland (*English Bards, etc.*, lines 680–686; *Poetical Works*, 1898, i. 351, note 2).]

20 [Compare—

"And yet I could not die."

*ANCIENT MARINER*, PART IV. LINE 262.]

21 [Compare—

"I wept not; so all stone I felt within."

DANTE'S *INFERNO*, XXXIII. 47 (CARY'S TRANSLATION).]

22 [Compare "Song by Glycine"—

"A sunny shaft did I behold,  
From sky to earth it slanted;  
And poised therein a bird so bold—  
Sweet bird, thou wert enchanted," etc.

*ZAPOLYA*, BY S. T. COLERIDGE, ACT II. SC. 1.]

23 [Compare—

"When Ruth was left half desolate,  
Her Father took another Mate."

*RUTH*, BY W. WORDSWORTH, *WORKS*, 1889, P. 121.]

24 ["The souls of the blessed are supposed by some of the Mahommedans to animate green birds in the groves of Paradise."—Note to Southey's *Thalaba*, bk. xi. stanza 5, line 13.]

25 [Compare—

"I wandered lonely as a cloud."

*WORKS OF W. WORDSWORTH*, 1889, P. 205.]

26 [Compare—

"Yet some did think that he had little business here."

*IBID.*, P. 183.

Compare, too, *The Dream*, line 166, *vide post*, p. 39—

"What business had they there at such a time?"]

27 [Compare—

"He sighed, and turned his eyes, because he knew  
'Twas but a larger jail he had in view."

DRYDEN, *PALAMON AND ARCITE*, BK. I. LINES 216, 217.

Compare, too—

"An exile—  
Who has the whole world for a dungeon strong."

*PROPHECY OF DANTE*, IV. 131, 132.]

28 [Compare—

"The harvest of a quiet eye."

*A POET'S EPITAPH*, LINE 51, *WORKS OF W. WORDSWORTH*, 1889, P. 116.]

g

*I saw them with their lake below,  
And their three thousand years of snow.—[MS.]*

29 [This, according to Ruskin's canon, may be a poetical inaccuracy. The Rhone is blue below the lake at Geneva, but "les embouchures" at Villeneuve are muddy and discoloured.]

30 [Villeneuve.]

31 Between the entrances of the Rhone and Villeneuve, not far from Chillon, is a very small island [Ile de Paix]; the only one I could perceive in my voyage round and over the lake, within its circumference. It contains a few trees (I think not above three), and from its singleness and diminutive size has a peculiar effect upon the view.

32 [Compare—

"Of Silver How, and Grasmere's peaceful lake,  
And one green island."

*WORKS OF W. WORDSWORTH*, 1889, P. 220.]

33 [Compare the Ancient Mariner on the water-snakes—

"O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare,"

*ANCIENT MARINER*, PART IV. LINES 282, 283.

There is, too, in these lines (352–354), as in many others, an echo of Wordsworth. In the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle* it is told how the "two undying fish" of Bowscale Tarn, and the "eagle lord of land and sea" ministered to the shepherd-lord. It was no wonder that the critics of 1816 animadverted on Byron's "communion" with the Lakers. "He could not," writes a Critical Reviewer (Series V. vol. iv. pp. 567–581), "carry many volumes on his tour, but among the few, we will venture to predict, are found the two volumes of poems lately republished by Mr. Wordsworth. . . . Such is the effect of reading and enjoying the poetry of Mr. W., to whose system (ridiculed alike by those who could not, and who would not understand it) Lord Byron, it is evident, has become a tardy

convert, and of whose merits in the poems on our table we have a silent but unequivocal acknowledgment.”]

<sup>34</sup> [Compare the well-known lines in Lovelace’s “To Althea—From Prison”—

“Minds innocent and quiet take  
That for an hermitage.”]

[h] Here follows in the MS.—

*Nor stew I of my subjects one—  
What sovereign hath so little done?  
yet so much hath*