

Mr. Hamlin Garland is a realist, and this is the way that Mrs. Blakesly actually talked. It is pretty hard luck if a realist can be held personally responsible for everything that his characters do and say. Think of poor M. Zola in such a case!

## XI.

When we made our rule not to return rejected manuscripts even when stamps are enclosed, a good many persons wrote to ask us how we could justify ourselves. So (in the January number) we justified ourselves. Immediately every one of them sent us a transcription of the French proverb *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*. This made them very happy, so that we didn't mind it; but really the proverb applies only to those who defend themselves before they are attacked, and this we haven't done. Letters on this subject still keep pouring in, most of them very long, but adding nothing new to the discussion. One letter, however, raises an ethical question, so that we print it in full for the benefit of the literary world. The writer is evidently a violent sort of person, and we grieve to say that in the course of his letter he employs a wicked, wicked word, which we feel obliged to represent by a dash for the protection of our younger readers.

"Criticising your remarks on page 484 of THE BOOKMAN for January, *re* the return of rejected manuscripts, the point is this: If stamps sufficient to cover the cost of returning manuscript are sent you, and you refuse to return property that does not belong to you—you are a ——— thief!"

"Don't fall back on others or write of precedents, but be man enough to shoulder your own responsibilities."

"Two wrongs don't make a right."

"READER."

Now, as to the principle involved in the point here raised, we assume that after we have given due notice that no manuscripts are returned even when stamps are enclosed, if intending contributors still continue to send us stamps, these are obviously not meant to be returned, but are to be regarded as little offerings to the editors; and as we are not at all proud, we accept them gratefully, for we have a large correspondence, and stamps are always useful. But dear, dear! what a fuss about a few postage-stamps!

## XII.

A wise and perspicacious reader pens the following sentiment:

"THE BOOKMAN is journalism of a sublime order."

Thanks.

Several letters remain to be answered at some future time.

## NEW BOOKS.

## THE WORKS OF LORD BYRON.\*

## I.

Our generation is not likely to know all that is to be known about Byron. There are probably documents in reserve, in addition to accessible new documents. But Mr. Henley has begun a new edition of his Letters and other remains in prose, with copious and very entertaining notes. Even specialists will find Mr. Henley's notes more than adequate in the matter of biography and elucidation of events and allusions, also as pictures of the age. A few remarks on details are made below. Certain-

ly, if we are to understand Byron, we must understand his *milieu*, "bigoted yet dissolute," with other veracious antitheses. Perhaps one generation is not much more dissolute than another. Byron and his coevals may remind one of the Duke of Wharton and his. Byron could not well be much more dissolute than Wharton, of whom Atterbury was so fond; and Wharton's genius might, perhaps, have rivalled Byron's, if he could have abstained from drink and the service of the king over the water. Both men were young, noble, notorious, full of power—and spoiled. Mr. Henley regards Byron as "the master poet" of the generation, and here I am, in one sense, unable to follow him. Even setting Coleridge, Words-

\* The Works of Lord Byron. Edited by W. E. Henley. Vol. I., Letters: 1804-13. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.75.

worth, and Scott aside as seniors, men of an elder generation, I am obliged to regard Keats and Shelley as poets infinitely greater than Byron. But, as their generation stoned them, while to Byron it listened eagerly, there is a sense in which Byron is undeniably its "master poet." Now the great Byron mystery is not Mrs. Beecher Stowe's legend, nor anything else that can be elucidated by documents, either in Mr. Henley's or in Mr. Murray's promised edition. The real mystery is the division of opinion about Byron's poetical merits. Mr. Henley has Scott, Goethe, Mr. Arnold, and the opinion of Byron's Europe on his side. On mine might be reckoned Thackeray and Mr. Swinburne in his later humour, and, perhaps, the common consent of the little flock which still cares for poetry. All the members of the little flock, to be sure, are not exactly allies with whom one would gladly march through Coventry. A person who ventures to think that Byron, as a poet, was egregiously over-rated, must be content to be called a prig, a sniffer, and so forth. The public which does not read poetry takes Byron for granted, and assumes that these epithets are well deserved. But a man can only say what he thinks! I am as much convinced as Mr. Henley can be of Byron's vigour, his powers of satire, his sensibility to what is great in nature, and to certain captivating ideas, Freedom and the like. On the other hand, I miss in him the indefinable essence of poetry, that which we admire in the great Elizabethans, and Cavaliers, in Milton, and in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Tennyson, nay, even in "Miss Byron," Alfred de Musset. Byron seems to me to be, as a writer, a poet of Pope's generation, who has read Scott, lives after the French Revolution, has travelled, and has had adventures. If Wharton (the Duke) could have lived when Byron did, he might have been a poet like Byron, and might have lacked exactly what in Byron one misses. Not only the indefinable poetical essence is absent in Byron, but his *technique*, and even his grammar, are often deplorable. In an essay of Mr. Hayward's, the passages chosen to prove Byron's superiority in lucidity to Tennyson usually defy construction. And these are chosen passages. Byron's blank verse will scarcely be defended by any mortal.

These are enormous drawbacks, yet Byron won almost every contemporary suffrage, and still holds many. Why? This is the Byron mystery. One allows for *rêclame*, the *rêclame* of Byron's youth, beauty, rank, wit; for his *legend*—the queer romantic tales that Goethe believed. One allows for the novel element, the combination of Scott's still popular measures (very ill done) with Oriental romance, and the gloomy Byronic corsair. One allows for Byron's fine large topics, Greece, the sea, ruined empires, tempest, freedom; and probably the combination of so many obviously captivating things, poetical and personal, carried the contemporaries of Byron off their feet. The tradition swayed Mr. Arnold, but was wasted on Thackeray. A great deal, at lowest, remains to Byron, a unique place in letters, but for that poetic essence which lives in the works of the highest poets, I still think that one looks to Byron in vain. But it is too early to reiterate these heresies, if they are heresies. When Mr. Henley comes to publish Byron's poems, he may be able to convert one, though conversion is difficult in a question determined for every man by intuition.

On Byron's character it is vain to waste words. What character could one expect in a man of his education, position, passions, and hereditary qualities? In his earliest letters we find him damning, boasting of being drunk, and talking about "crim-cons" to a Miss Pigot, with whom he had "a charming friendship." His mother he speaks of in the tone we know, though his letters to "The Honourable Mrs. Byron" (he would call her "Honourable") are not wanting in respect. He was never at ease with his title, as other young men of rank were at ease. He was an inveterate *poseur*; thus he writes of Lords Aberdeen and Elgin,

"Come, pilfer all the Pilgrim loves to see" in the way of Greek remains. The Pilgrim was really bored by Greek remains. He "unreservedly avowed," says Moore, "the little value he had for these relics of ancient art." He was the same in everything, "that man never was sincere." He had noble impulses, but all was evanescent. He was the *fanfaron* of his vices, and may very well have been less vicious than he pre-

tended. Mr. Henley thinks he only had, perhaps, one friend, Lord Clare, though so many were anxious to be friendly. Without going into details and disputed points, it is not an amiable character, but nothing short of a moral miracle could have saved a man born and trained as Byron was. Again, Scott, Moore, perhaps Shelley, who knew him, saw him in another and a happier light; while Leigh Hunt (whom I cheerfully hand over to Mr. Henley's mercies) saw him in a worse.

Andrew Lang.

## II.

It is impossible to speak too highly of the interest and value of Mr. Henley's notes. They show a minute and intimate knowledge of the men and manners of the first quarter of our century, such as it is likely that few living men possess; and in fact they contain the raw materials and suggestions for a history of that remarkable period which Mr. Henley himself aptly describes in these sentences of his Preface:

"The years whose voice-in-chief was Byron have always seemed to me among the most personal, so to speak, as they are certainly the worst understood in the national existence. They were years of storm and triumph on all the lines of national destiny; and they gave to history a generation at once dandified and truculent, bigoted yet absolute, magnificent but vulgar (or so it seems to us), artistic, very sumptuous and yet capable of astonishing effort and superb self-sacrifice. It was a generation bent above all upon living its life to the uttermost of its capacity; and though there are still those living who can remember when its master-poet was gathered to his fathers, so great a change has come upon his England in the interval between the obsequies at Hucknall Torkard and the writing of this Preface, that it is practically not less remote from ours than the England of Spenser and Raleigh."

In the preparation of his notes, Mr. Henley has drawn upon the most varied sources of information—upon memoirs and letters, upon histories and newspapers, upon squibs and pasquinades and popular songs and pamphlets, and upon private sources that are available to very few. The result is extraordinarily interesting, and brings up most vividly an environment whose contemplation justifies Mr. Henley's view of its intellectual and social remoteness from our own generation. In many respects it is much nearer to the England of Swift than to the England of Tennyson.

Take this bit, for instance, from Mr. Henley's account of that strange personality, Lady Caroline Lamb, afterward Lady Melbourne, whose relations with Byron formed only one of her innumerable escapades. Mr. Henley quotes from her own story of her first meeting with Lord Byron:

"Rogers and Moore were standing by me. I was on the sofa; I had just come in from riding. I was filthy and heated. When Lord Byron was announced I flew out of the room to wash myself. When I returned, Rogers said: 'Lord Byron, you are a happy man. Lady Caroline has been sitting in all her dirt with us; but when you were announced she flew to beautify herself.'"

One can scarcely turn a page without finding something of curious interest relating to every possible sphere of life, the highest as well as the lowest. Here are the contemporary annals of the prize-ring, in which Mr. Henley is evidently deeply learned. Here is a sketch of the career and personality of Lord Yarmouth, afterward Marquis of Hertford, whom Disraeli drew as Monmouth in *Coningsby*, and whom a greater than Disraeli consigned to a fearful immortality as Lord Steyne in *Vanity Fair*. Mr. Henley points out that these two delineations of the same dissolute noble are not only both masterpieces but masterpieces that supplement each other, in that Disraeli dwells more upon the magnificence of his subject, while Thackeray, whose picture will always be uppermost in the reader's mind, gives us rather the debauched patrician, an awesome figure with red hair and jarring voice and gleaming tusks. How he left to John Wilson Croker (who figures in Thackeray as Mr. Wenham) over £20,000, while the Countess Zichy and his other mistresses got more than £200,000; how his valet, who appears in *Vanity Fair* as M. Fiche, enriched himself with a sum almost as large; how the Marquis once kicked the Prince of Wales, and how a contemporary lampoon (which Mr. Henley quotes) described this and many other odd but characteristic details, are all set down in full.

Mr. Henley devotes much space to Thomas Moore, and has the courage and the honesty to do full justice to his powers as a writer of light, brilliant, and scarifying insolence, and to the exquisite rhythmical quality of his songs. Leigh Hunt is flayed in a most savage