

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE

A Romaunt

Canto I

To Ianthe⁴⁶

Not in those climes where I have late been straying,
 Though Beauty long hath there been matchless deemed;
 Not in those visions to the heart displaying
 Forms which it sighs but to have only dreamed
 Hath aught like thee in truth or fancy seemed: 5
 Nor having seen thee shall I vainly seek
 To paint those charms which varied as they beamed,
 To such as see thee not my words were weak,
 To those who gaze on thee what language could they speak?

Ah! may'st thou ever be what now thou art,⁴⁷ 10
 Nor unbeseem the promise of thy spring,
 As fair in form, as warm yet pure in heart,
 Love's image upon earth without his wing,
 And guileless beyond Hope's imagining!
 And surely she who now so fondly rears 15
 Thy youth, in thee thus hourly brightening,
 Beholds the rainbow of her future years,
 Before whose heavenly hues all sorrow disappears. –

Young Peri of the West!⁴⁸ – 'tis well for me
 My years already doubly number thine; 20
 My loveless eye unmoved may gaze on thee,
 And safely view thy ripening beauties shine;
 Happy, I ne'er shall see them in decline,
 Happier, that while all younger hearts shall bleed,
 Mine shall escape the doom thine eyes assign, 25
 To those whose admiration shall succeed,
 But mixed with pangs to Love's even loveliest hours decreed.

Oh! let that eye, which, wild as the Gazelle's,
 Now brightly bold, or beautifully shy, 30
 Wins as it wanders, dazzles where it dwells,
 Glance o'er this page, nor to my verse deny
 That smile for which my breast might vainly sigh,
 Could I to thee be ever more than friend,
 This much, dear maid, accord – nor question why
 To one so young my strain I would commend, 35
 But bid me with my wreath one matchless lily blend.

46: Ianthe is Lady Charlotte Harley, daughter of B.'s lover the Countess of Oxford. These stanzas were not added to *CHP* I until the seventh edition, in 1814. She was then thirteen years old.

47: Compare Heine's *Du bist wie eine blume* ...

48: A Peri is an Islamic fairy: see *TBoA*, 151 or 567.

Such is thy name with this my verse entwined;
 And long as kinder eyes a look shall cast
 On Harold's page – Ianthe's here enshrined
 Shall thus be first beheld, forgotten last; 40
 My days once numbered, should this homage past
 Attract thy fairy fingers near the lyre
 Of him who hailed thee, loveliest as thou wast,
 Such is the most my memory may desire,
 Though more than Hope can claim – could Friendship less require? 45

1.

Oh, thou! in Hellas deemed of heavenly birth,
 Muse! formed or fabled at the minstrel's will!
 Since shamed full oft by later lyres on earth,
 Mine dares not call thee from thy sacred hill:
 Yet there I've wandered by thy vaunted rill; 5
 Yes! sighed o'er Delphi's long deserted shrine, *
 Where save that feeble fountain, all is still;
 Nor mote⁴⁹ my shell awake the weary Nine
 To grace so plain a tale – this lowly lay of mine.

* The little village of Castri⁵⁰ stands partly on the site of Delphi. Along the path of the mountain, from Chryso, are the remains of sepulchres hewn in and from the rock: "One," said the guide, "of a king who broke his neck hunting." His Majesty had certainly chosen the fittest spot for such an achievement.

A little above Castri is a cave, supposed the Pythian, of immense depth; the upper part of it is paved, and now a cow-house.

On the other side of Castri stands a Greek monastery; some way above which is the cleft in the rock, with a range of caverns difficult of ascent, and apparently leading to the interior of the mountain; probably to the Corcyrian Cavern mentioned by Pausanias. From this part descend the fountain and the "Dews of Castalie."

2.

Whilome in Albion's isle there dwelt a youth 10
 Who ne in virtue's ways did take delight;
 But spent his days in riot most uncouth,
 And vexed with mirth the drowsy ear of Night.
 Ah, me! in sooth he was a shameless wight,
 Sore given to revel and ungodly glee; 15
 Few earthly things found favour in his sight
 Save concubines and carnal companie,
 And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree.

49: "mote" means "must": the word is the first of several Spenserianisms which B. uses in *CHP* I.

50: B. and H. arrived at Castri (in ancient Greece, site of the Delphic Oracle) on Saturday December 16th 1809.

3.

Childe Harold was he hight: – but whence his name
 And lineage long, it suits me not to say; 20
 Suffice it, that perchance they were of fame,
 And had been glorious in another day:
 But one sad losel⁵¹ soils a name for aye,
 However mighty in the olden time;
 Nor all that heralds rake from coffined clay, 25
 Nor florid prose, nor honeyed lies of rhyme,
 Can blazon evil deeds, or consecrate a crime.

4.

Childe Harold basked him in the noon-tide sun,
 Disporting there like any other fly;
 Nor deemed before his little day was done 30
 One blast might chill him into misery.
 But long ere scarce a third of his passed by,
 Worse than adversity the Childe befell;
 He felt the fulness of satiety:
 Then loathed he in his native land to dwell, 35
 Which seemed to him more lone than Eremite's sad cell.

5.

For he through Sin's long labyrinth had run,
 Nor made atonement when he did amiss,
 Had sighed to many though he loved but one,⁵²
 And that loved one, alas! could n'er be his. 40
 Ah, happy she! to 'scape from him whose kiss
 Had been pollution unto aught so chaste;
 Who soon had left her charms for vulgar bliss,
 And spoiled her goodly lands to gild his waste,
 Nor calm domestic peace had ever deigned to taste.⁵³ 45

6.

And now Childe Harold was sore sick at heart,
 And from his fellow bacchanals would flee;
 'Tis said, at times the sullen tear would start,
 But Pride congealed the drop within his ee:
 Apart he stalked in joyless reverie, 50
 And from his native land resolved to go,
 And visit scorching climes beyond the sea;
 With pleasure drugged he almost longed for woe,
 And e'en for change of scene would seek the shades below.⁵⁴

51: A losel or lozel is a rascal. See *The Winter's Tale*, II, iii, 108.

52: Perhaps a covert reference to Mary Chaworth.

53: The lines describe B.'s father, and B., when in 1815 he tried domestic life.

54: As Manfred does in the second act of the play which bears his name. It may be that Harold visits the shades below on his excursion to see Ali Pacha, whose fortress is on the Acherousian Lake