*George Gordon, Lord Byron*

*Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Canto IV*

I

I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;

A palace and a prison on each hand:

I saw from out the wave her structures rise

As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand:

A thousand years their cloudy wings expand

Around me, and a dying Glory smiles

O'er the far times, when many a subject land

Look'd to the winged Lion's marble piles,

Where Venice sate in state, throned on her hundred isles!

II

She looks a sea Cybele, fresh from ocean, 10

Rising with her tiara of proud towers

At airy distance, with majestic motion,

A ruler of the waters and their powers:

And such she was; -- her daughters had their dowers

From spoils of nations, and the exhaustless East

Pour'd in her lap all gems in sparkling showers.

In purple was she robed, and of her feast

Monarchs partook, and deem'd their dignity increased.

III

In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more,

And silent rows the songless gondolier; 20

Her palaces are crumbling to the shore,

And music meets not always now the ear;

Those days are gone -- but Beauty still is here.

States fall, arts fade -- but Nature doth not die,

Nor yet forget how Venice once was dear,

The pleasant place of all festivity,

The revel of the earth, the masque of Italy!

IV

But unto us she hath a spell beyond

Her name in story, and her long array

Of mighty shadows, whose dim forms despond 30

Above the dogeless city's vanish'd sway;

Ours is a trophy which will not decay

With the Rialto; Shylock and the Moor,

And Pierre, can not be swept or worn away --

The keystones of the arch! though all were o'er,

For us repeopled were the solitary shore.

V

The beings of the mind are not of clay;

Essentially immortal, they create

And multiply in us a brighter ray

And more beloved existence: that which Fate 40

Prohibits to dull life, in this our state

Of mortal bondage, by these spirits supplied,

First exiles, then replaces what we hate;

Watering the heart whose early flowers have died,

And with a fresher growth replenishing the void.

VI

Such is the refuge of our youth and age,

The first from Hope, the last from Vacancy;

And this warn feeling peoples many a page,

And, may be, that which grows beneath mine eye:

Yet there are things whose strong reality 50

Outshines our fairy-land; in shape and hues

More beautiful than our fantastic sky,

And the strange constellations which the Muse

O'er her wild universe is skilful to diffuse:

VII

I saw or dream'd of such, -- but let them go, --

They came like truth, and disappear'd like dreams;

And whatsoe'er they were -- are now but so:

I could replace them if I would; still teems

My mind with many a form which aptly seems

Such as I sought for, and at moments found; 60

Let these too go -- for waking Reason deems

Such overweening phantasies unsound,

And other voices speak, and other sights surround.

VIII

I've taught me other tongues -- and in strange eyes

Have made me not a stranger; to the mind

Which is itself, no changes bring surprise;

Nor is it harsh to make, nor hard to find

A country with -- ay, or without mankind;

Yet was I born where men are proud to be,

Not without cause; and should I leave behind 70

The inviolate island of the sage and free,

And seek me out a home by a remoter sea,

IX

Perhaps I loved it well; and should I lay

My ashes in soil which is not mine,

My spirit shall resume it -- if we may

Unbodied choose a sanctuary. I twine

My hopes of being remember'd in my line

With my land's language: if too fond and far

These aspirations in their scope incline, --

If my fame should be, as my fortunes are, 80

Of hasty growth and blight, and dull Oblivion bar

X

My name from out the temple where the dead

Are honour'd by the nations -- let it be --

And light the laurels on a loftier head!

And be the Spartan's epitaph on me --

'Sparta hath many a worthier son than he.'

Meantime I seek no sympathies, nor need;

The thorns which I have reap'd are of the tree

I planted, -- they have torn me, -- and I bleed:

I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed. 90

XI

The spouseless Adriatic mourns her lord;

And, annual marriage now no more renew'd,

The Bucentaur lies rotting unrestored,

Neglected garment of her widowhood!

St. Mark yet sees his lion where he stood,

Stand, but in mockery of his wither'd power,

Over the proud Place where an Emperor sued

And monarchs gazed and envied in the hour

When Venice was a queen with an unequall'd dower.

XII

The Suabian sued, and now the Austrian reigns -- 100

An Emperor tramples where an Emperor knelt;

Kingdoms are shrunk to provinces, and chains

Clank over sceptred cities, nations melt

From power's high pinnacle, when they have felt

The sunshine for a while, and downward go

Like lauwine loosen'd from the mountain's belt;

Oh, for one hour of blind old Dandolo!

Th' octogenarian chief, Byzantium's conquering foe.

XIII

Before St. Marks still glow his steeds of brass,

Their gilded collars glittering in the sun; 110

But is not Doria's menace come to pass?

Are they *not bridled*? -- Venice, lost and won,

Her thirteen hundred years of freedom done,

Sinks, like a sea-weed, into whence she rose!

Better be whelm'd beneath the waves, and shun,

Even in destruction's depth, her foreign foes,

From whom submission wrings an infamous repose.

XIV

In youth she was all glory, -- a new Tyre, --

Her very by-word sprung from victory,

The 'Planter of the Lion,' which through fire 120

And blood she bore o'er subject earth and sea;

Though making many slaves, herself still free,

And Europe's bulwark 'gainst the Ottomite;

Witness Troy's rival, Candia! Vouch it, ye

Immortal waves that saw Lepanto's fight!

For ye are names no time nor tyranny can blight.

XV

Statues of glass -- all shiver'd -- the long file

Of her dead Doges are declined to dust;

But where they dwelt, the vast and sumptuous pile

Bespeaks the pageant of their splendid trust; 130

Their sceptre broken, and their sword in rust,

Have yielded to the stranger: empty halls,

Thin street, and foreign aspects, such as must

Too oft remind her who and what enthrals,

Have flung a desolate cloud o'er Venice' lovely walls.

XVI

When Athens' armies fell at Syracuse,

And fetter'd thousands bore the yoke of war,

Redemption rose up in the Attic Muse,

Her voice their only ransom from afar:

See! as they chant the tragic hymn, the car 140

Of the o'ermaster'd victor stops, the reins

Fall from his hands -- his idle scimitar

Starts from its belt -- he rends his captive's chains,

And bids him thank the bard for freedom and his strains.

XVII

Thus, Venice, if no stronger claim were thine,

Were all thy proud historic deeds forgot,

Thy choral memory of the Bard divine,

Thy love of Tasso, should have cut the knot

Which ties thee to thy tyrants; and thy lot

Is shameful to the nations, -- most of all, 150

Albion! to thee: the Ocean queen should not

Abandon Ocean's children; in the fall

Of Venice think of thine, despite thy watery wall.

XVIII

I loved her from boyhood -- she to me

Was as a fairy city of the heart,

Rising like water-columns from the sea,

Of joy the sojourn, and of wealth the mart;

And Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare's art,

Had stamped her image in me, and even so,

Although I found her thus, we did not part, 160

Perchance even dearer in her day of woe,

Than when she was a boast, a marvel, and a show.

XIX

I can repeople with the past -- and of

The present there is still for eye and thought,

And meditation chastened down, enough;

And more, it may be, than I hoped or sought;

And of the happiest moments which were wrought

Within the web of my existence, some

From thee, fair Venice! have their colours caught:

There are some feelings Time cannot benumb, 170

Nor Torture shake, or mine would now be cold and dumb.

XX

But from their nature will the tannen grow

Loftiest on loftiest and least shelter'd rocks,

Rooted in barrenness, where nought below

Of soil supports them 'gainst the Alpine shocks

Of eddying storms; yet springs the trunk, and mocks

The howling tempest, till its height and frame

Are worthy of the mountains from whose blocks

Of bleak, gray granite into life it came,

And grew a giant tree; -- the mind may grow the same. 180

XXI

Existence may be borne, and the deep root

Of life and sufferance make its firm abode

In bare and desolated bosoms: mute

The camel labours with the heaviest load,

And the wolf dies in silence, -- not bestow'd

In vain should such example be; if they,

Things of ignoble or of savage mood,

Endure and shrink not, we of nobler clay

May temper it to bear, -- it is but for a day.

XXII

All suffering doth destroy, or is destroy'd 190

Even by the sufferer; and, in each event,

Ends: -- Some, with hope replenish'd and rebuoy'd,

Return to whence they came -- with like intent,

And weave their web again; some, bow'd and bent,

Wax gray and ghastly, withering ere their time,

And perish with the reed on which they leant;

Some seek devotion, toil, good or crime,

According as their souls were form'd to sink or climb.

XXIII

But ever and anon of griefs subdued

There comes a token like a scorpion's sting, 200

Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness imbued;

And slight withal may be the things which bring

Back on the heart the weight which it would fling

Aside for ever: it may be a sound --

A tone of music -- summer's eve -- or spring --

A flower -- the wind -- the ocean -- which shall wound,

Striking the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound;

XXIV

And how and why we know not, nor can trace

Home to its cloud this lightning of the mind,

But feel the shock renew'd, nor can efface 210

The blight and blackening which it leaves behind,

Which out of things familiar, undesign'd,

When least we deem of such, calls up to view

The spectres whom no exorcism can bind,

The cold -- the changed -- perchance the dead -- anew,

The mourn'd, the loved, the lost -- too many! -- yet how few!

XXV

But my soul wanders; I demand it back

To meditate amongst decay, and stand

A ruin amidst ruins; there to track

Fall'n states and buried greatness, o'er a land 220

Which *was* the mightiest in its old command,

And *is* the loveliest, and must ever be

The master-mould of Nature's heavenly hand,

Wherein were cast the heroic and the free,

The beautiful, the brave -- the lords of earth and sea,

XXVI

The commonwealth of kings, the men of Rome!

And even since, and now, fair Italy!

Thou art the garden of the world, the home

Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree;

Even in thy desert, what is like to thee? 230

Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste

More rich than other climes' fertility;

Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced

With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced.

XXVII

The moon is up, and yet it is not night --

Sunset divides the sky with her -- a sea

Of glory streams along the Alpine height

Of blue Friuli's mountains; Heaven is free

From clouds, but of all colours seems to be,

Melted to one vast Iris of the West, 240

Where the Day joins the past Eternity;

While, on the other hand, meek Dian's crest

Floats through the azure air -- an island of the blest!

XXVIII

A single star is at her side, and reigns

With her o'er half the lovely heaven; but still

Yon sunny sea heaves brightly, and remains

Roll'd o'er the peak of the far Rhaetian hill,

As Day and Night contending were, until

Nature reclaim'd her order: -- gently flows

The deep-dyed Brenta, where their hues instil 250

The odorous purple of a new-born rose,

Which streams upon her stream, and glass'd within it glows,

XXIX

Fill'd with the face of heaven, which, from afar,

Comes down upon the waters; all its hues,

From the rich sunset to the rising star,

Their magical variety diffuse:

And now they change; a paler shadow strews

Its mantle o'er the mountains; parting day

Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues

With a new colour as it gasps away, 260

The last still loveliest, till -- 'tis gone -- and all is gray.