

THE PRISONER OF CHILLON

Edited by Peter Cochran from Byron's rough draft, and the fair copies by Mary Shelley and Claire Claremont.



TEXTUAL INTRODUCTION

THE PRISONER OF CHILLON: THE CASE FOR MULTIPLE AUTHORSHIP

Albè, Percy, Mary, Clare

[A paper given on September 13th 1997 at the Anglia Polytechnic University Mary Shelley Conference, *Mary Shelley: Parents, Peers, Progeny.*]

I propose in this paper to refer to the four protagonists Mary Godwin, Claire Claremont, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and George Gordon, Sixth Baron Byron of Rochdale, as “Mary”, “Clare”, Percy”, and “Albè”.

The Prisoner of Chillon was drafted, at some time between Thursday June 27th and Saturday 29th June 1816, at Ouchy, near Lausanne on the north shore of Lake Geneva, round from the Castle to which its action, or rather its inaction, is confined. The drafting was probably done in Albè's room (westernmost, front, second floor) at the Hotel de l'Ancre, Ouchy; for Albè and Percy were detained there by heavy rain after their traumatic tour of the Castle on Tuesday June 25th. They had started their tour of the Lake – unaccompanied by Clare and Mary – on Saturday June 22nd.

The poor-quality, highly absorbent blue laid paper of which the first and fourth sheets of the draft are constituted (they seem originally to have been one) suggests Albè improvising, on the only paper the inn room could provide late at night; but the rest of the draft is on better-quality, white laid paper – albeit of two different types – perhaps provided by the landlord (although some extra stanzas to *Childe Harold* III are also on blue, laid paper, with the same watermark – see *Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics, Byron VII*, p. xi.)

Even at this early stage of composition, an element of doubt creeps in as to whose idea is whose, for several emendations are in pencil, and in a hand other than Albè's. For example, on the first side of the fifth sheet, at received line 144, Albè's original *But why withhold the blow? – he died* – is changed in another hand to *But why delay the truth? – he died* – and at received line 148, Albè's original *Though hard I strove but strove in vain / To break or bite my bonds in twain* is changed in the same different hand to the more desperate *Though hard I strove but strove in vain / To rend & gnash my bonds in twain*. On the first sheet of the seventh side, (in the same pencilled hand, with more open loops on the "f"s than Albè's) received lines 215-18, *The last – the sole – dearest link / Between me & the eternal brink / Which lay between me and our race / Was broken in this fatal place* – are changed to *The last – the sole – the dearest link / Between me & the eternal brink / Which bound me to my failing race / Was broken in this fatal place ...*

It is a commonplace of Albè criticism to say that he was at this time undergoing a Wordsworthian period: I count nine direct lifts from Wordsworth in *The Prisoner*, including the outrageous *We were seven, who now are one* at line 17. It is equally a commonplace to say that the presence of Percy would, at the very least, not have militated against such an inclination. "The presence of Percy", in short, is a vital part of the creative scenario. Had he not been with Albè on the tour of the Castle of Chillon – had he not been, perhaps, present in the inn room where the poem was drafted – it could have been quite a different work. His Wordsworthian metaphysics and his radical politics are both felt, almost throughout; although the inert nihilism experienced by *The Prisoner* in Part 9 (*Among the stones I stood, a stone*) is neither Shelleyan nor Wordsworthian.

The two men left Ouchy on June 29th and arrived back at Diodati on the evening of June 30th. Albè seems immediately to have given his rough draft not to Clare (who had already fair-copied *Childe Harold III* and many of his other 1816 poems) but, for some reason, to Mary. She seems to have started copying it at once, before they all went to bed in their two different houses, for it is dated, by Albè, *June 30th* at its start and *July 2^d* at the end. The notebook in which Mary makes it is identical to the one in which Percy fair-copies *Mont Blanc* and in which she fair-copies the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. Both notebooks were part of the Scrope Davies find in a Barclay's Bank vault in 1976.

Albè does not find a perfect copyist in Mary. He has to correct many small details in her work; but what is fascinating is the number of readings which alter his draft's meaning, but which he allows, some with good reason, some without. I shall mention only the changes he allows.

At line 102, Mary prefers *Those relics of a home so dear* to Albè's *These relics of a home so dear* and this is the reading of all editions.

At lines 115-16, Albè's draft has *Below the surface of the bay / The dark cells lie wherein we lay* – However, Mary copies it as *Below the surface of the lake / The dark cells lie wherein we lay* – and Albè does not bother to correct, even though his rhyme has gone. The reading also stands to this day.

At line 139, Albè's *heart & limb* is copied *heart or limb* by Mary. Her reading stays.

At lines 156-7, Albè's draft has a false rhyme: *That even in death his freeborn heart / In such a dungeon could not rest*: Mary substitutes *breast* for *heart* (when fair-copying *Don Juan* in later years she often does the reverse) and the reading stayed.

At line 189, Albè has *And grieved for those were left behind*. Mary dislikes *were*, and writes *And grieved for those he left behind*. This too is the received reading.

Mary underlines both the opening "I"s of lines 212-13, which in Albè's original would run

*I only stirred in this black spot,
I only lived – I only drew
The accursed breath of dungeon-dew ...*

Clare, in *her* fair-copy, of which I shall soon speak, underlines all three "I"s in the same lines, and this is the received reading:

*I only stirred in this black spot,
I only lived – I only drew
The accursed breath of dungeon-dew ...*

Neither of the two fair copies, conversely, carries over Albè's emphasis for *only* at line 212, and neither does any subsequent edition.

At lines 269-70, Albè's draft has *And song that said a thousand things / And seemed to sing them all for me*. Once more Mary finds herself in creative disagreement, and copies 270 *And seemed to say them all for me*. Clare follows suit, and the reading stayed.

At 287-8, Albè has *I sometimes deemed that it might be / My brother's soul come down for me*: but Mary changes the preposition, and the lines have always been *I sometimes deemed that it might be / My brother's soul come down to me*, which seems to make a big difference. Albè's bird is a harbinger of death, Mary's not.

Mary's would not have been a perfect printer's copy. Several changes are made to the text by Albè, sometimes in such a way as to create serious decipherment problems. The first two of the longest passages are already present in his original – done with a pen sharper, and in an ink darker, than the matrix pen and ink. First, lines 80 to 87 (italicised in the following) which elaborate the beautiful spirit of The Prisoner's younger brother:

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>For he was beautiful as Day</i> | |
| <i>(When Day was beautiful to me</i> | 80 |
| <i>As to young Eagles being free)</i> | |
| <i>A polar Day which will not see</i> | |
| <i>A Sunset till its Summer's gone,</i> | |
| <i>Its sleepless Summer of long light</i> | |
| <i>The Snow-clad offspring of the Sun;</i> | 85 |
| <i>And thus he was as pure and bright,</i> | |
| <i>And in his natural Spirit gay,</i> | |
| <i>With tears for nought but others' ills,</i> | |
| <i>And then they flowed like mountain rills ...</i> | |

In the draft, this is written, messily and with no prior sketch in evidence, at right-angles to the matrix script, in the right-hand margin of Sheet 3 side 1. It has many erasures – Albè is creating directly on the page. It is then added vertically and with perfect neatness to the fifth page of Mary's fair copy. The initial work on the passage should, it seems logical to think, have been done after July 2nd, when she finished work on her fair copy, and at a time when it was not available; her line-numbering, however, takes it into account. Next, lines 103-6, which elaborate the description of the rugged spirit of The Prisoner's older brother:

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>He was a hunter of the hills</i> | |
| <i>Had followed there the deer and wolf</i> | |
| <i>To him this dungeon was a gulph,</i> | 105 |
| <i>And fettered feet the worst of ills.</i> | |

These lines are written, without erasure, straight down the middle of the page, at right-angles to the matrix script, on Sheet 3 side 2 of Albè's draft. They are then written at right angles over the previous new passage, on the fifth page of Mary's copy. Mary's line-numbering take this insertion into account as well. Presumably she delayed doing the line-numbering for a while.

Another section (lines 279-92) is added by Albè in the draft to the end of section 10, at right angles to the first nine lines of the first side of the ninth sheet. It elaborates the description of the Bird, which suddenly appears to cheer the Prisoner's loneliness. Here is its neat form:

I know not if it late were free,

Within a few days of Percy and Albè returning from their tour, Clare's pregnancy was announced, and Albè made it clear that she could have no part in his life – indeed, that he no longer wished to see her. On Monday 16th July she tried to make contact, taking advantage of the fact that Mary's fair copy was, thanks to all the insertions, no longer perfect printer's copy – protesting, perhaps, at what had become a demarcation dispute between her and her "half-step-sister":

We go I believe in two days – Are you satisfied? –

It would make me happy to finish Chillon for you. It is said that you expressed yourself decisively last Evening that it is impossible to see you at Diodati; If you will trust it down here I will take the greatest possible care of it; & finish it in an hour or two. Remember how {very} short a time I have to teize you & that you will soon be left to your dear=bought freedom. Let me have Chillon, then pray do – and one of your own Servants with it & some pens. Tell me one thing else? – Shall I never see you again? Not once again.

When you had such bad news to announce <I> was it not a little cruel to behave so harshly all the day. Pray send me an answer directly – I cannot wait. (Clare to Albè, 26th August 1816 – John Murray Archive / National Library of Scotland; Stocking I, 52).

In fact she, Mary and Percy didn't go until August 29th. Her fair copy (for she was allowed to make one) takes up pages 121 to 153 of the volume (now in the John Murray Archive) containing her fair copies of *Childe Harold III*, *Darkness*, *Prometheus*, *The Dream*, the *Epistle to Augusta* and other poems. This is a most interesting document, which has received insufficient attention. It has pages 192 to 204, which obviously had been numbered by Clare, missing. Page 191 contains the end of *Darkness*, copied in a hand not Clare's, showing that the original has been removed, with, on the reverse, the opening of the *Epistle to Augusta*. Page 205 contains the last two lines of the *Epistle*, in Clare's hand. thus:

slow
We are entwined; let Death come <slow> or fast
The tie, which bound the first, endures the last.

The lines are squirled through in pencil, and "omit" is written over them. Why the pages are cut out is not clear: the *Epistle to Augusta* was not printed in *Poems, 1816*; but it was in Moore's *Life*, using which manuscript we shall, again, never know. What Clare's emotions were, as she dutifully copied Albè's love-letter to his half-sister, we can only guess. We can also only guess what her emotions were when, expecting her ex-lover's manuscript to work from, she was presented by a servant with the fair copy already made by Mary. She was not, perhaps, to know that the original draft had by now been left well behind.

Clare's fair copy of *The Prisoner* is unique in one respect: it is called *The Prisoners of Chillon / a fable*. – the plural does not carry over into the first or any later editions. She is a more accurate copyist than Mary: either that, or she is advantaged in having Mary's fair copy to work from, rather than Albè's confusing original. Her main creative input is to add four terminal exclamation marks, all of which become part of the poem. They are at lines 250, 270, 378 and 387:

A Sea of stagnant Idleness
Blind – boundless – mute & motionless!

A lonely bird with azure wings
And song that said a thousand things,
And seemed to say them all for me!

These heavy walls to me had grown
A hermitage – and all my own!

And I the monarch of each race
 Had power to kill, – yet strange to tell!
 In quiet we had learned to dwell ...

The lines are perhaps reflections of her own feelings, now that she knows her relationship with Albè to be over, and as such more worthy of exclamation marks than mere full-stops.

Although nothing added to the text by either of Albè's copyists makes any major structural or thematic difference, I hope I have shown that the process of its composition reflects in interesting ways the social and emotional patterns existing between Mary, Clare, Percy, and Albè at Diodati in July 1816.



[*The Prisoner of Chillon and Other Poems* was first published by John Murray on December 5th 1816, in an edition of 6000 copies.]

This edition is based on the rough draft at the Beinecke Library, Yale, and the fair copies by Clare Clairmont in the John Murray Archive, and by Mary Godwin in the British Library, collated with the editions of Eugen Kölbing (Weimar, 1898), E.H.Coleridge (John Murray, 1922), and J.J.McGann (Oxford, 1986). In the notes, I have “borrowed generously” from all three – in this “economy edition”, without acknowledgement. Where they have only indicated a text, I have given it.

The Prisoner of Chillon
A fable. –

My hair is grey, but not with years,
Nor grew it white
In a single night,
As Men's have grown from sudden fears;¹ *
My limbs are bowed, though not with toil, 5
But rusted with a vile repose,²
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 and barred – forbidden fare; 10
But this was for my Fathers' faith
I suffered chains and courted death;
That Father perished at the stake
For tenets he would not forsake;³
And for the same, his lineal race 15
In darkness found a dwelling-place;
We were seven – who now are One,⁴
Six in youth and one in age,
Finished as they had begun,
Proud of Persecution's rage; 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, 25
Of whom this wreck is left the last. –

* Note: Ludovic Sforza⁵ and others – the same is asserted of Marie Antoinette's, the wife of Louis 16th 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.

2.

There are seven pillars of Gothic mold
In Chillon's dungeons deep and old;⁶
There are seven columns massy and grey,
Dim with a dull imprisoned ray, 30
A Sunbeam which hath lost its way;

1: Compare Scott's *Marmion*, I xviii: (*For deadly fear can time outgo, / And blanch at once the hair ...*)

2: ... *rusted with a vile repose*: compare *The Giaour*, 990-3: *I'd rather be the thing that crawls / Most noxious o'er a dungeon's walls / Than pass my dull, unvarying days / Condemn'd to meditate and gaze ...*

3: *That Father perished at the stake / For tenets he would not forsake*: Louis Bonivard died at a date before 1524, in his bed, or at any rate naturally. No particular "tenets" are ascribed to him.

4: *We were seven - who now are One*: That Byron may consciously be echoing Wordsworth's *We Are Seven* is a suggestion so outrageous that no editor has ever dared make it; but it should be entertained.

5: *Byron's note*: Ludovico Sforza (1451–1508), Duke of Milan. The French imprisoned him in the Castle of Loches (1500), where he died after eight years. Marie Antoinette (1755-93) wife to Louis XVI, was imprisoned for less than a year before being guillotined.

6: *There are seven pillars of Gothic mold*: Shelley: "... the principal dungeon is supported by seven columns" (see below, received 115n).

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;⁷ 35
 And in each pillar there is a ring,⁸
 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 40
 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 45
 When my last Brother drooped and died,
 And I lay living by his side.

3.

They chained us each to a column stone,
 And we were three⁹ – 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 pined in heart, 55
 '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, 65
 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

7: *Like a Marsh's meteor lamp*: one of B.'s favourite images. Compare *Manfred*, I i 195, *Don Juan*, VII 346, 5-5; XI stanza 27, XV, 430; *TVOJ*, 837; *Manfred*, I i 195; *The Prisoner of Chillon*, 35; *Mazepa*, 619; *The Deformed Transformed*, stage-direction at I i 480; *Werner*, III iii 40-1; and *The Island*, IV 86.

8: *And in each pillar there is a ring*: "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." The inscription was in situ as early as August 22, 1820, as Richard Edgcumbe points out (*Notes and Queries*, Series V. xi. 487). Shelley: "... iron rings are fastened to these columns ..." (see below, received 115n). Gavin de Beer (*Shelley and his Circle* IV 699) gives as his opinion that neither Byron nor Shelley ever carved their names on any pillar.

9: *And we were three* ... The historical Bonivard was imprisoned alone.

I ought to do, and did my best,
 And each did well in his degree.
 The youngest – whom my Father loved,¹⁰
 Because our mother's brow was given
 To him, with eyes as blue as heaven – 75
 For him my soul was sorely moved,
 And truly might it be distrest
 To see such bird in such a nest,
 For he was beautiful as Day
 (When Day was beautiful to me 80
 As to young Eagles being free)¹¹
 A polar Day which will not see
 A Sunset till its Summer's gone,
 Its sleepless Summer of long light
 The Snow-clad offspring of the Sun; 85
 And thus he was as pure and bright,
 And in his natural Spirit gay,¹²
 With tears for nought but others' ills,
 And then they flowed like mountain rills,
 Unless he could assuage the woe 90
 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, 95
 And perished in the foremost rank¹³
 With joy; but not in chains to pine;
 His spirit withered with their clank –
 I saw it silently decline –

10: the descriptions of the two brothers, and the fraternal love between them, have a distinguished pedigree. Leaving aside the Palamon and Arcite of Chaucer and Dryden – who are not clearly distinguished from one another – one pair is Clorindan and Medoro, from *Orlando Furioso*, Cantos XVIII and XIX:

*Clorindan cacciatore tutta sua vita
 Di robusta persona era, ed insella.
 Medoro avea la guancia colorita,
 E bianca, e grata nell'età novella;
 E fra la gente a quella impresa uscita
 None era faccia più gioconda, e bella.
 Occhi avea neri, e chioma crespa d'oro,
 Angel pareva di quei del sommo Coro. (XVIII st.166)*

[*Clorindan, a hunter all his life, was robust and straight-backed. Medoro's cheek was red and white as if in his earliest years; people said on first seeing him that none looked more joyful or more beautiful. His eyes were black, his hair golden – he seemed an angel from the first rank.*]

11: *When day was beautiful to me / As to young Eagles being free:* compare *Childe Harold*, III 784-7, or *Prophecy*, III 70-2. (*But they, / Who in oppression's darkness caved had dwelt, / They were not eagles, nourish'd with the day ... But few shall soar upon the eagle's wing, / And look in the sun's face with eagle's gaze, / All free and fearless as the feathered king ...*)

12: The addition of lines 80-6 to the fair copy means that the rhyme for line 79 does not arrive until now.

13: *And perished in the foremost rank:* compare *Childe Harold* III 207: *He rush'd into the field, and, foremost fighting, fell;* or *Don Juan*, VII 516-18: *... I confess / My debt in being thus allowed to die / Among the foremost ...*

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 gulph, 105
 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,*
 Which roundabout the wave enthralls;
 A double dungeon wall and wave
 Have made, and like a living grave;¹⁴
 Below the surface of the bay¹⁵ 115
 The dark vault lies wherein we lay;
 We heard its 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,¹⁶

14: ... like a living grave: compare *Bride*, II 1094. (*Yet dread me, from my living tomb ... What recks it? Though that corse shall lie / Within a living grave?* Compare also *The Prophecy of Dante*, V 147-8: ... is not love in vain / Torture enough without a living tomb?)

15: *Below the surface of the bay / lake:* After Byron's note: The belief or tradition that Bonivard's prison is "below the surface of the lake," for which Shelley as well as Rousseau is responsible, The relevant part of Shelley's letter to Peacock (a part written on June 26th, 1816) goes as follows: "We passed on to the Castle of Chillon, and visited its dungeons and towers. These prisons are excavated below the lake; the principal dungeon is supported by seven columns, whose branching capitals support the roof. Close to the very walls, the lake is 800 feet deep; iron rings are fastened to these columns, and on them were engraven a multitude of names, partly those of visitors, and partly doubtless of the prisoners, of whom now no memory remains, and who thus beguiled a solitude which they have long ceased to feel. One date was as ancient as 1670.

At the commencement of the Reformation, and indeed long after that period, this dungeon was the receptacle of those who shook, or who denied the system of idolatry, from the effects of which mankind is even now slowly emerging. Close to this long and lofty dungeon was a narrow cell, and beyond it one larger and far more lofty and dark, supported upon two unornamented arches. Across one of these arches was a beam, now black and rotten, on which prisoners were hung in secret. I never saw a monument more terrible of that cold and inhuman tyranny, which it has been the delight of man to exercise over man. It was indeed one of those many tremendous fulfilments which render the 'pernicies humani generis' of the great Tacitus so solemn and irrefragable a prophecy. The gendarme, who conducted us over this castle, told us that there was an opening to the lake, by means of a secret spring, connected with which the whole dungeon might be filled with water before the prisoners could possibly escape!" – *Letters*, ed. Jones (Oxford 1964) I 352-3.

16: *And I have felt it shake unshocked:* Coleridge, from Kölbinger: 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. Paronomasy: pun. The "real" Bonivard, who, for example, once called all his fellow Genevan churchmen together on pretence of having something of weight to read them, and delivered a comedy by Machiavelli, seems indeed to have been a trickster, if not necessarily a punster. For further "puns",

Because I could have smiled to see
The death that would have set me free. 125

* Note: The Chateau 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 Bonnard have left their traces – he was confined here several years. –

It is by this castle that Rousseau has fixed the catastrophe of his Heloise, 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 Chateau is large and seen along the lake for a great distance – The walls are white. –¹⁷

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 hunters' fare, 130
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 captive's tears
Have moistened many a thousand years, 135
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 mold¹⁸ 140
Which in a palace had grown cold,
Had his free breathing been denied
The range of the steep mountain's side;
But why delay the truth? – he died –
I saw, and could not hold his head, 145
Nor reach his dying hand – nor dead;
 Though hard I strove, but strove in vain,
 To rend and gnash my bonds in twain,
 He died – and they unlocked his chain,
And scooped for him a shallow grave 150
Even from the cold earth of our cave;
I begged them as a boon to lay

see received line 106 above: ... *fettered feet*; or 185 below: ... *so sweetly weak*. The effect is inevitable in a poem like *The Prisoner*, written in dense octosyllabics with heavy alliteration.

17: B read Rousseau's *Julie* on his sailing tour of the lake with Shelley (BLJ V 82). This note recalls Rousseau's last note to Part VI, Letter 8.

18: *My brother's grief was of that mold* ...: compare *Don Juan* II st.87 and Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII 4-75. (The deaths of The Prisoner's two brothers anticipates the deaths of the two boys on board the wreck of the Holy Trinidad in *Don Juan*, and echoes those of Ugolino's sons in the *Inferno*.)

His corse in dust whereon the day
 Might shine – it was a foolish thought,
 But then within my brain it wrought, 155
 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 160
 The being we so much did love;
 His empty chain above it leant –
 Such murder's fitting monument!



Delacroix: The Prisoner of Chillon

8.
 But he, the favourite and the flower
 Most cherished since his natal hour, 165
 His mother's image in fair face,
 The infant love of all his race,
 His martyred Father's dearest thought,
 My latest care, for whom I sought
 To hoard my life that his might be 170
 Less wretched now – and one day free,
 He too – who yet had held untired
 A Spirit natural or inspired –
 He too was struck – and day by day
 Was withered on the stalk away¹⁹ – 175
 Oh God! – it is a fearful thing
 To see the human soul take wing

19: *Was withered on the stalk away:* Compare the death of Euryalus from *Aeneid IX*; Byron's version runs thus:

*He pray'd in vain, the dark assassin's sword,
 Pierc'd the fair side, the snowy bosom gor'd ...*

In any shape – in any mood;²⁰
 I've seen it rushing forth in blood,
 I've seen it on the breaking Ocean 180
 Strive with a swoln convulsive motion,
 I've seen the sick and ghastly bed
 Of Sin delirious with its dread;²¹
 But these were horrors – this was woe
 Unmixed with such – but sure and slow; 185
 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 190
 Was as a mockery of the tomb,²²
 Whose tints as gently sunk away
 As a departing rainbow's ray,
 An eye of most transparent light
 That almost made the dungeon bright; 195
 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 200
 In this last loss of all the most!
 And then the sighs he would suppress,
 Of fainting Nature's feebleness,²³
 More slowly drawn – grew less and less;
 I listened – but I could not hear – 205
 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 210
 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 215
 Between me and the eternal brink
 Which bound me to my failing race

20: *Oh, God! it is a fearful thing / To see the human soul take wing / In any shape – in any mood:* 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 that Goethe was under the impression that he had been guilty of a venial murder (see his review of *Manfred* in his paper *Kunst und Alterthum*, Letters, 1901, v. 506, 507). A year after these lines were written, when he was at Rome he saw three robbers guillotined, and observed himself and them from a psychological standpoint (see BLJ V 229-30).

21: *I've seen it on the breaking Ocean:* compare *E.B.S.R.*, 680-6 and n. (The death of Lord Falkland.)

22: *With all the while a cheek whose bloom / Was as a mockery of the tomb:* Compare *Manfred*, II iv 98-100: *Can this be death? There's bloom upon her cheek; / But now I see it is no living hue, / But a strange hectic ...* The Shakespearean parallel is Romeo over the apparently dead Juliet: see *Romeo and Juliet*, V iii 92-105.

23: *... fainting Nature's feebleness:* compare Johnson, *On the Death of Dr Robert Levet*, 13: *When fainting nature call'd for aid ...*

Was broken in this fatal place.
 One on the earth – and one beneath –
 My brothers; both had ceased to breathe; 220
 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 225
 That what we love shall ne'er be so;
 I know not why
 I could not die;²⁴
 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; 235
 Among the stones I stood – a Stone,²⁵
 And was – scarce conscious what I wist –
 As shrubless Craggs within the mist,²⁶
 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 time²⁷ – 245

24: *I know not why / I could not die:* compare “And yet I could not die” – *Ancient Mariner* IV 262.

25: *Among the stones I stood – a Stone:* Compare Dante’s *Inferno*, XXXIII 49. (*Io non piangea, s dentro impetra* – “I wept not; so all stone I felt within.” Dante’s *Inferno*, xxxiii. 47 (Cary’s translation) another reference to Ugolino: see above, 140 et. seq. n).

26: *As shrubless Craggs within the mist:* compare *Manfred*, II ii 64-5: *Where the birds dare not build, nor insect’s wing / Flit o’er the herbless granite ...*

27: *There were no stars – no earth – no time / No check – no change – no good – no crime:* compare *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, esp. II sts.6-8 and IV, st.3. The relevant verses are as follows:

*Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
 ‘Twas sad as sad could be;
 And we did speak only to break
 The silence of the sea!*

*All in a hot and copper sky,
 The bloody Sun, at noon,
 Right up above the mast did stand,
 No bigger than the Moon.*

*Day after day, day after day,
 We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
 As idle as a painted ship
 Upon a painted ocean.*

*Water, water, every where,
 And all the boards did shrink;*

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.²⁸ 250

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 255
 Ran over with the glad surprize,
 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; 260
 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 265
 That bird was perched, as fond and tame,²⁹
 And tamer than upon the tree;
 A lovely bird with azure wings,
 And song that said a thousand things,
 And seemed to say them all for me! 270
 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,³⁰

*Water, water, every where,
 Nor any drop to drink ...*

*... Alone, alone, all, all alone,
 Alone on a wide wide sea!
 And never a saint took pity on
 My soul in agony.*

There are several further echoes of *The Ancient Mariner* in *Mazeppa* and in *Don Juan II*.

28: The un-Wordsworthian, and un-Shelleyan, nature of these lines is striking, given the borrowings from Wordsworth noted elsewhere. Where a Shelleyan protagonist might derive hope from contemplating the landscape, Byron's Prisoner finds in it only a reflection of the horrible blankness of his own life. Compare the last entry in Byron's *Alpine Journal*, also written in 1816: ... *I am a lover of Nature – and an Admirer of Beauty – I can bear fatigue – & welcome privation – and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. – But in all this – the recollections of bitterness – & more especially of recent & more home desolation – which must accompany me through life – have preyed upon me here – and neither the music of the Shepherd – the crashing of the Avalanche – nor the torrent – the mountain – the Glacier – the Forest – nor the Cloud – have for one moment – lightened the weight upon my heart – nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty & the power and the Glory – around – above – & beneath me.* (BLJ V 104-5)

29: *That bird was perched, as fond and tame:* compare *Stanzas to Augusta*, 4-8: *And a bird in the solitude singing, / Which speaks to my spirit of thee.*

30: *It seemed like me to want a mate / But was not half so desolate:* compare Wordsworth's Ruth: "When Ruth was left half desolate, / Her father took another Mate ..."

And it was come to love me when 275
 None lived to love me so again,
 And cheering on my dugeon's brink
 Had brought me back to feel and think.
 I know not if it late were free,
 Or broke its cage to perch on mine, 280
 But knowing well captivity –
 Sweet Bird! – I could not wish for thine!
 Or if it were in winged guise
 A visitant from Paradise,
 For – Heaven forgive that thought! the while – 285
 Which made me both to weep and smile –
 I sometimes deemed that it might be
 My brother's soul come down to me³¹ –
 But then at last away it flew,
 And then 'twas mortal – well I knew, 290
 For He would never thus have flown,
 And left me twice so doubly lone³² –
 Lone as the corse within its shroud –
 Lone as a solitary Cloud,³³
 A single Cloud on a sunny day, 295
 While all the rest of Heaven is clear –
 A frown upon the Atmosphere,
 That hath no business to appear
 When skies are blue and earth is gay.

11.

A kind of change came in my fate – 300
 My keepers grew compassionate;
 I know not what had made them so –
 They were inured to sights of woe,
 But so it was – my broken chain
 With links unfastened did remain, 305
 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, 310
 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, 315
 My breath came gaspingly and thick,
 And my crushed heart fell blind, and sick.

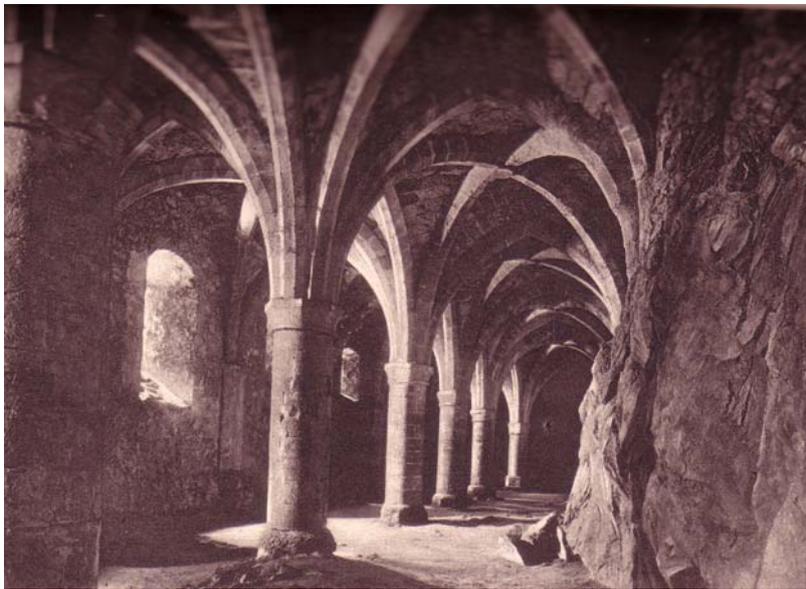
31: *I sometimes deemed that it might be / My brother's soul come down for me:* “The souls of the blessed are supposed by some of the Mahomedans to animate green birds in the groves of Paradise.” – note to Southey's *Thalaba*, bk. xi. St.5, 13. Southey's bird is, as the bird here may be, a ministering departed spirit.)

32: *And left me twice so doubly lone:* Compare Scott's *Marmion*, 'Introduction to Canto II', 134-5. (*When, musing on companions gone, / We doubly feel ourselves alone ...*)

33: *Lone as a solitary cloud:* Compare Wordsworth's “I wandered lonely as a cloud.”

12.

I made a footing in the wall,³⁴
 It was not therefrom to escape,
 For I had buried one, and all, 320
 Who loved me in a human shape;
 And the whole Earth would henceforth be
 A wider prison unto me³⁵ –
 No child – no Sire – no kin had I –
 No partner in my misery; 325
 I thought of this, and I was glad,
 For thought of them had made me mad,
 But I was curious to ascend
 To my barred windows, and to bend
 Once more upon the mountains high 330
 The quiet of a loving eye.³⁶



34: *I made a footing in the wall*: the windows of the dungeon are at head-height; but the thickness of the walls would make it hard to see through them for any distance with one's feet on the floor. See illustration on next page (*Byron's Works: Poetry*, IV, ed. Coleridge, opposite p.14).

35: *And the whole earth would henceforth be / A wider prison unto me*: Compare – “*He sighed, and turned his eyes, because he knew / 'Twas but a larger jail he had in view.*” Dryden, *Palamon and Arcite*, I 216-17. Compare, too – “*An exile – / Who has the whole world for a dungeon strong.*” *Prophecy of Dante*, IV 131-2. The most striking passage from the Dryden fable (his retelling of Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*) seems to be this:

*It happen'd Palamon the Pris'ner Knight,
 Restless for Woe, arose before the Light,
 And with his Jaylor's leave desir'd to breathe
 An Air more wholesom than the Damps beneath.
 This granted, to the Tow'r he took his way,
 Cheer'd with the Promise of a glorious Day:
 Then cast a languishing Regard around,
 And saw with hateful Eyes the Temples crown'd
 With golden Spires, and all the Hostile Ground ...*

36: *The quiet of a loving eye*: recalls Wordsworth's “The harvest of a quiet eye” (*A Poet's Epitaph*, 51).

13.

I saw them – and they were the same;
 They were not changed like me in frame;
 I saw their thousand years of snow³⁷
 On high – their wide long lake below, 335
 And the blue Rhone in fullest flow;³⁸
 I heard the torrents leap and gush
 O'er channelled rock and broken bush,
 I saw the white-walled distant town,³⁹
 And whiter sails go skimming down,⁴⁰ 340
 And then there was a little isle*
 Which in my very face did smile,
 The only one in view;

37: *I saw their thousand years of snow:* compare what Alp sees at *The Siege of Corinth*, 319 et. seq.:... on the brow / Of Delphi's hill, unshaken snow, / High and eternal, such as shone / Through thousand summers brightly gone ...

38: *And the blue Rhone in fullest flow:* This ... may be a poetical inaccuracy. The Rhone is blue below the lake at Geneva, but "les embouchures" at Villeneuve are muddy and discoloured. The dungeon is too close to the level of the lake for the colour of the Rhone's entrance to be visible from it. The Rhone can be seen from the castle battlements. See Hobhouse's diary: ... saw view of the lake from the upper part of the castle where Rhone comes into the lake ... (BL.Add.Mss. 56536 f.125r: quoted Clubbe and Giddey, *Byron et la Suisse*, p.40). Neither Rousseau nor Shelley were guilty of the error. See *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, Part IV, Letter XVII (St. Preux is boating with Julie, in the absence of her husband): Là j'expliquois à Julie toutes les parties du superbe horizon qui nous entourait. Je lui montrais de loin les embouchures du Rhône dont l'imptueux cours s'arrête tout à coup au bout d'un quart de lieue, et semble craindre de souiller de ses eaux bourbeuses le cristal azuré du lac. (*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, ed. Mornet, III 279-80). Shelley, who admits to having been reading the novel all day, echoes the section: "We passed from the blue waters of the lake over the stream of the Rhone, which is rapid" (cp. Byron's "fullest flow") "even at a great distance from its confluence with the lake; the turbid waters mixed with those of the lake, but mixed with them unwillingly". (Letters, ed. Jones, I 353). Kölbing refers us to maternal imagery at *Childe Harold III*, st.71: ... *the blue rushing of the arrowy Rhone, / Or the pure bosom of its nursling lake ...* and at *Don Juan XIV*, st.87:

... like the Rhone by Leman's waters washed,
 Where mingled and yet separate appears
 The river from the lake, all bluely dashed
 Through the serene and placid glassy deep,
 Which fain would lull its river-child to sleep.

39: *I saw the white-walled distant town:* Probably not Villeneuve but either St. Gingolph or Meillerie. St. Gingolph and Meillerie would be more clearly in the line of view from Chillon. Kölbing comments sensibly, *Welcher Ortschaft Byron hier im Auge gehabt hat, lässt sich nicht mit Sicherheit sagen ... Wir verstehen, mit wie Schmerzlichen Gefühlen unser Gefangener nach der white walled distant town hinschaut, die ihm gleichsam die menschliche Gesellschaft repräsentiert, von welcher er ausgeschlossen ist.* He also mentions Lambro, who at *Don Juan III* st.27 ... saw his white walls shining in the sun, and the cliffs of Dover at *Don Juan X* st.65, which rose, like a white wall along / The blue seas border. The white walls seen by the Prisoner are a sign for Byron of a home destroyed.

40: *And whiter sails go skimming down:* Compare *Letter to John Murray Esqre.:* *But what seemed the most "poetical" of all – at the moment – were the numbers (about two hundred) of Greek and Turkish Craft – which were obliged to "cut and run" before the wind – from their unsafe anchorage – some for Tenedos – some for other isles – some for the Main – and some it may be for Eternity. – – The Sight of these little scudding vessels darting over the foam in the twilight – now appearing – and now disappearing between the waves in the cloud of night – with their peculiarly white sails – (the Levant sails not being of "coarse canvas" but of white cotton) skimming along – as quickly – but less safely than the Sea-Mew which hovered over them – their evident distress – their reduction to fluttering specks in the distance – their crowded succession – their littleness as contending with the Giant element – which made our stout 44's teak timbers (she was built in India) creak again, – their aspect – and their motion – all struck me as something far more "poetical" than the mere broad – brawling – shipless Sea and the sullen winds could possibly have been without them (CMP 131).*

A small green Isle – it seemed no more⁴¹
 Scarce broader than my dungeon floor; 345
 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 wild flowers growing,
 Of gentle breath and hue. 350
 The fish swam by the castle wall,
 And they seemed joyous each and all;⁴²
 The Eagle rode the rising blast⁴³ –
 Methought he never flew so fast,
 As then to me he seemed to fly, 355
 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 360
 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. 365

* Note: Between the entrances of the Rhone and Villeneuve, not far from Chillon, is a very small Island – 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.

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. 370
 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.⁴⁴
 And thus when they appeared at last, 375
 And all my bonds aside were cast,

41: *A little isle – it seemed no more:* in fact there are two small islands visible from the cell window. However, see Hobhouse's diary: ... saw ... – also the little islet with a few trees on it [–] the only islet in the lake ... (BL.Add.Mss.56536, f.125r: printed Clubbe and Giddey, *Byron et la Suisse*, p.40).

42: *And they seemed joyous each and all:* Compare the Ancient Mariner on the water-snakes –

“O happy living things! no tongue

Their beauty might declare.”

Ancient Mariner, IV 282-3.

There is, too, in these lines (352-4), 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.

43: *The Eagle rode the rising blast:* compare above, 80-1.

44: *I learned to love despair:* compare *CHP* III st.16. (*The very knowledge that he lived in vain ... Had made Despair a smilingness assume.*)

These heavy walls to me had grown
 A hermitage – and all my own!
 And half I felt as they were come
 To tear me from a second home; 380
 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, 385
 And I, the Monarch of each race,
 Had power to kill – yet, strange to tell!
 In quiet we had learned to dwell;
 Nor slew I of my subjects one –
 What Sovereign hath so little done?⁴⁵ 390
 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.⁴⁶ –

When the foregoing 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 – some account of his life will be found in a note appended to the “Sonnet on Chillon” with which 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 antient Freedom. – – – –

45: Coleridge: Here follows in the MS. –

Nor slew I of my subjects one –
 {hath so little}
 What sovereign done?
 {yet so much hath}

These lines were never been printed, except as variants, in any edition before McGann. They are part of all three MSS. They were removed without authorization by Murray and Gifford when the poem was going through the press. For details see Commentary to *CHP* III. Byron was left in the dark about the omission until after publication: *I do not exactly understand from your letter what has been omitted – or what not – in the publication – but I shall see probably some day or other – I could not attribute any but a good motive to Mr. G[ifford] or yourself in such omission – but as our politics are so very opposite – we should differ as to the passages – however if it is only a note or notes – and a line or so – it cannot signify.* (Letter to Murray, February 15th 1817: BLJ V 169). Compare Byron’s wrath the following year at Gifford’s omission of Manfred’s death-line (BLJ V 257). *Nor slew I of my subjects one – / What Sovereign hath so little done?:* compare *Sardanapalus*, II i 314-15: *... there are worse things betwixt earth and heaven / Than him who ruleth many and slays none.*

46: *Regained my freedom with a sigh:* perhaps a recollection of these lines from Francis Hodgson’s Prologue to his translation of Juvenal (see BLJ II 95 or III 150):

*When sly Octavius seiz’d th’imperial reins,
 And hid in flow’rs the despot’s iron chains,
 Afflicted Rome, worn out with warlike toils,
 And the long bloodshed of domestic broils,
 Beheld, unmov’d, her ancient honour die,
 And gave her freedom up without a sigh. (The Satires of
 Juvenal, tr. Hodgson, London 1807 p.
 xxxvii)*

The following, mostly in an unidentifiable hand, but with the title in Byron's, is placed in Claire Clairmont's fair copy between pages 152 and 153:

+ Note to the Sonnet on Chillon. –

François de Bonnivard, fils de Louis de Bonnivard, originaire de Seyssel & Seigneur de Lunes, naquit en 1496; it fit Ses études à Turin; en 1510 Jean Aimé de Bonnivard Son oncle lui resigna le Prieuré de St. Victor, qui aboutissoit aux murs de Geneve, & qui formait un benefice considerable.

Ce grand homme (Bonnivard mérite ce titre 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 & la vivacité de Son esprit), ce grand homme, qui excitera l'admiration de tous ceux qu'une vertue héroïque peut encore émouvoir, inspirera la plus vive reconnaissance dans les coeurs des Genevois qui aiment Geneve. Bonnivard en fut toujours un des plus fermes appuis: pour assurer la liberté de nôtre République, il ne craignait pas de perdre Souvent la sienne; il oublia Son repos; il méprisa <s/>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 & la chaleur d'un Patriote.

Il dit dans le commencement de son histoire de Geneve, 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 interêts; c'est ce goût pour la liberté qui lui fit sans doutes adopter Geneve pour sa patrie.

Bonnivard, encore jeune, S'annonça hautement comme le defenseur de Geneve contre le Duc de Savoye et l'Evêque.

En 1519, Bonnivard devient le martyr de sa patrie: Le Duc de Savoye etant entré dans Geneve 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'accompagnoient, & conduit par ordre du Prince à Grolée, où il resta prisonnier pendant deux ans. Bonnivard étoit malheureux dans ses voyages: comme ses malheurs n'avoient point ralenti Son zèle por Geneve, il étoit toujours un ennemi redoutable pour ceux qui la menaçoient, & par conséquent il devoit être exposé à leurs coups. Il fut recontré en 1530 Sur le Jura par des Voleurs, qui le dépouillèrent, & qui le mirent encore entre les mains du Duc de Savoye: 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 de Vaud.

Bonnivard, en sortant de Sa captivité, eut le plaisir de trouver Geneve libre & reformée; la République s'empressa de lui témoigner Sa reconnaissance et de le dedommager 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-General, et elle lui assigna une pension de 200 écus d'or tant qu'il séjourneroit à Geneve. Il fut admis dans le Conseil des Deux-Cent en 1537.

Bonnivard n'a pas fini d'être utile: après avoir travaillé à rendre Geneve libre, il réussit à la rendre tolérante. Bonnivard engagea le Conseil à accorder aux Ecclesiastiques & aux paysans un tems suffisant pour examiner les propositions qu'on leur faisoit; 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 avoit bien lu les auteurs classiques latins, & qu'il avoit approfondi la théologie & l'histoire. Ce grand homme aimoit les Sciences, et il croyoit qu'elles pouvoient faire la gloire de Geneve; 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; & ces livres sont en partie les rares & belles éditions du quinzième siecle qu'on voit dans notre Collection. Enfin, pendant la même année, ce bon patriote institua la Republique Son héritière, à condition qu'elle employeroit Ses biens à entretenir le Collee dont on projettoit la fondation.

Il paroît 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.

TRANSLATION: “François de Bonnivard, son of Louis de Bonnivard, Lord of Lunes, was born in Seyssel in 1496; he studied at Turin; in 1510 Jean Aimé de Bonnivard, his uncle, bequeathed him the Priory of St. Victor, which abutted on the walls of Geneva, and which formed a considerable benefice.

This great man (Bonnivard deserves this title, by the strength of his soul, the righteousness of his heart, the nobility of his motives, and the wisdom of his counsels, the bravery of his deeds, the width of his knowledge and the vivacity of his spirit), this great man, who will excite the reverence of everyone who can still be moved by the sight of a heroic virtue, inspires the most lively admiration in the hearts of those Genovese who love Geneva. Bonnivard was always one of its stoutest pillars; in order to ensure the freedoms of our republic, he was not averse to losing his own, which he often did; he forgot his rest; he despised his riches; he left nothing alone in order to affirm the goodness of a fatherland which he honoured from choice: from the moment he chose it he cherished it as zealously as did the most zealous of its citizens; he served it with the bravery of a hero, and wrote its history with the innocence of a philosopher and the warmth of a patriot.

At the start of his History of Geneva, he writes that ever since he began to read the history of nations, his taste has led him towards republics, the interests of which he often espoused; it is doubtless this taste for liberty which led him to adopt Geneva as his homeland.

While still young, Bonnivard publicly proclaimed himself as the defender of Geneva against the Duke and Bishop of Savoy.

In 1519, Bonnivard became the martyr of his country: the Duke of Savoy having entered Geneva with five hundred men, Bonnivard feared his hostility, and wanted to retire to Fribourg in order to avoid him; but he was betrayed by two of his companions, and conveyed on the Duke’s command to Grolée, where he remained prisoner for two years. Bonnivard was unlucky in his travels; as his misfortunes had in no way lessened his love for Geneva, he remained at all times an enemy to those who threatened it, and was in consequence exposed to their violence. In 1530, in the Jura, he encountered some robbers, who stripped him and placed him once again in the hands of the Duke of Savoy: that Prince imprisoned him in the Castle of Chillon, where he remained without charge or questioning until 1536; he was then delivered by the Bernese, who were securing the Pays de Vaud.

On leaving his captivity, Bonnivard had the pleasure of finding Geneva free and reformed; the Republic went out of its way to show him its gratitude, and to make good the ills which he had suffered; he was made a Burgess of the city in June 1536; he was given the house occupied previously by the Vicar-General, and a pension of two hundred gold écus for as long as he stayed in Geneva. In 1537 he was admitted on to the Council of Two Hundred.

Bonnivard had not ceased to be useful; after having worked to make Geneva free, he succeeded in making it tolerant. Bonnivard persuaded the Council to allow priests and peasants enough time to examine the propositions put to them; he succeeded by his gentleness; Christianity is never preached with greater success than when it is preached with charity.

Bonnivard was a scholar; his manuscripts, which are in the Public Library, prove that he had read the classical Latin authors thoroughly, and that he had a profound knowledge of theology and history. This great man loved the sciences, and believed that they could prove to be the glory of Geneva; he neglected no means by which they could be cultivated in this growing city; in 1551 he donated his library to the state, and it laid the foundations of our Public Library; from these books come in part the rare and beautiful fifteenth-century editions which can be seen in our collection. Finally, in the same year, this excellent patriot made the Republic his heirs, on condition that they should invest his wealth in the maintenance of the college, the foundation of which was being planned.

It seems that Bonnivard died in 1570; but we cannot be sure, because there is a gap in the records between July 1570 and 1571.”

Byron knew none of this when he wrote the poem; but discovering that Bonnivard had been a highly-repectable martyr for Republican liberty, a foe of Dukes and bishops, and a pattern of charity and tolerance, will not have done his feelings on his choice of subject any harm. To place it – even behind the discreet veil of its original tongue – in a publication of the Tory John Murray, would have added to his pleasure. E.H.Coleridge traces the passage to the 1786 work *Histoire Littéraire de Genève* by Jean Senebier (1741-1809) I 131-7. With some adjustment of the upercasing of the “s”s, it is placed in the first edition, as note to line 13 of the *Sonnet on Chillon*:

*Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!
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. –*

The text of the poem here is from Byron's own fair copy, in the John Murray Archive, where it is on page 120 of Claire Clairmont's book, just before *The Prisoners of Chillon*. Byron's decision to append the Swiss academic note to the Sonnet rather than to the main poem may be his way of signalling the "Fable" nature of the latter.

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