

# AN HISTORIC PUBLISHING HOUSE

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NOWHERE else in the world can the history of literature be made so concrete as it can be in London; and nowhere else in London are literary relics of a certain epoch so lovingly stored as at 50, Albemarle Street. For the House of Murray the Publishers is old and renowned. It has lived and worked here for 114 years.

As all the world knows, it was John Murray, second of the name, who was Byron's publisher, who published *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan* and many another of Byron's famous poems. Probably the relations of no other publisher to authors have been so intimate and notable as were Murray's. Scarcely has any other publisher lived so continuously in that fierce light which beats on literary thrones. Murray knew practically everyone worth knowing in the London of his day; and the gatherings of literary men in the drawing-room of 50, Albemarle Street have been described by more than one pen. Curwen in his *History of Booksellers* thus wrote:

His drawing-room at four o'clock became the favourite resort of all the talent and art that London then possessed; and there *were* giants in those days. There it was the custom of an afternoon to gather together such men as Byron, Scott, Moore, Campbell, Southey, Gifford, Hallam, Lockhart, West, Irving and Mrs. Somerville; and more than this, he invited such artists as Lawrence, Wilkie, Phillips, Newton and Pickersgill to meet them and to paint them, that they might hang for ever on his walls.

It was from this commonplace looking house one day, in 1812, that the first canto of *Childe Harold* emerged to arouse the admiration of the world and enable Byron to say that he awoke one morning to find himself famous. The actual house in which he thus awoke has been pulled down, but on the site a large house now numbered 8, St. James's Street—not three minutes' walk from his publishers—is marked with a bust of the poet. 50, Albermarle Street to all external appearances is as commonplace and uninteresting as the many thousands of other brick and stuccoed houses of its time throughout London. This house, however, the present

home of the Murray family, not only contains a veritable museum of literary relics but is in itself a charming example of a Queen Anne dwelling.

It should be understood that there are two houses side-by-side numbered 50; Number 50, a private residence since 1812, and Number 50A, which is used as the offices and business premises of this famous firm of publishers. It should further be made clear that the present is the fifth generation of Murray, yes of John Murray, which has published books. John Murray the first, a Scotsman born in Edinburgh in 1745, came to London as an officer in the Royal Marines, but finding the service too uneventful for his tastes sold his commission in 1768 and bought Sandby's book-selling business in Fleet Street, opposite St. Dunstan's Church. This founder of the firm, who published Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature* and a periodical, *The English Review*, died in 1793.

His son John, the second, born in 1778, started the *Quarterly Review*, that great organ of Tory opinion, in 1809, and removed the business in 1812 to Albemarle Street. This was Byron's Murray, the man to whom Byron wrote many verses, and with whom he was on terms of such intimacy. His verses are jocular and informal, for Byron hated formality among his friends. To this Murray and of this this *Review* Byron wrote in July 1821—"Are you aware that Shelley has written an elegy on Keats, and accuses the *Quarterly* of killing him?"—to which he adds

Who killed John Keats?  
 "I", says the *Quarterly*,  
 So savage and Tartarly,  
 'Twas one of my feats.

John Keats may have been annoyed at the *Review*, but what he died of in Rome was acute tuberculosis.

The second Murray died in 1843.

The third John Murray, who was born in 1808 and died in 1892, published, among other well-known books, Livingstone's *Travels and Last Journals*, *The Origin of Species* and others of Darwin's works, the works of Samuel Smiles, and the famous *Handbooks for Travellers*, the first of which appeared in 1836, the first five of them being written by Murray himself. The fourth John Murray, C.V.O., is the present head of the firm; and his son Lieut.-Colonel John Murray, D.S.O., the fifth of the name, is associated with him in the historic business.

Not long ago Colonel Murray was kind enough to show me the famous room where the *literati* used to assemble, where Scott

and Byron first met, and where on one occasion in 1824 the Byron memoirs were burned in the very same fire-place which is there to this day. This famous room is the drawing-room of the house, and has three large windows looking into Albemarle Street; its ceiling is covered with handsome plaster work reminding one of the style of the brothers Adam. A smaller room opens off it, with a window that looks west towards Dover Street. Both rooms are beautifully furnished; from their walls look down the portraits of many of the famous men of the time of the second Murray; and in the white, glass-fronted bookcases are stored the many literary treasures which have come into the possession of the Murray family.

Of Byron himself there are two portraits; one a very pleasing likeness by T. Phillips, R.A., so often engraved, in which the poet is looking to the right, and another by the same artist which represents Byron in Turkish dress—the only portrait which represents him with a small moustache. Some of the other portraits of literary interest are those of S. T. Coleridge, Tom Moore by Lawrence, Thomas Campbell, John Gibson Lockhart by Phillips, Southey by the same artist, Thomas Gray, Henry Hallam, Gifford the first editor of *The Quarterly* by Hoppner, George Borrow and Mrs. Somerville. Byron knew this room well: there is an interesting allusion to the noise of Albemarle Street in his "Epistle from Mr. Murray to Dr. Polidori." Dr. Polidori, a physician of Italian descent, was a member of Byron's entourage, and he seems to have written a tragedy which Murray wished to refuse.

Byron sends from Venice to Murray a rhyming letter refusing the play:

I write in haste; excuse each blunder;  
The coaches through the street so thunder!  
My room's so full—we've Gifford here  
Reading MS., with Hookam Frere,  
Pronouncing on the nouns and particles  
Of some of our forthcoming articles.

As I was saying, sir, the room  
The room's so full of wits and bards,  
Crabbes, Campbells, Crokers, Freres and Wards,  
And others neither bards nor wits  
My humble tenement admits.

A party dines with me to-day,  
All clever men who make their way,  
Crabbe, Malcolm, Hamilton and Chantrey  
Are all partakers of my pantry!

My hands so full, my head so busy,  
 I'm almost dead, and always dizzy,  
 And so, with endless truth and hurry  
 Dear Doctor, I am yours, John Murray.

(August, 1817).

In these informal and amusing lines Byron gives us a vivid sketch of 50, Albemarle Street as he saw it in his own day. Those of us who have been privileged to visit the room can easily picture the place and the people. In this famous drawing-room in 1815 Lord Byron and Walter Scott met for the first time. Sir Walter's own account of it is so interesting and charming that it must be now given. He wrote:—"Report had prepared me to meet a man of peculiar habits and quick temper; and I had some doubts whether we were likely to suit each other in society. I was most agreeably disappointed in this respect. I found Lord Byron in the highest degree courteous and even kind. We met for an hour or two almost daily in Mr. Murray's drawing-room, and found a good deal to say to each other. Our sentiments agreed a good deal, except upon the subjects of religion and politics, upon neither of which I was inclined to believe that Lord Byron entertained very fixed opinions....."

I saw him for the last time in September, 1815, after I returned from France; he dined or lunched with me at Long's in Bond Street." This disposes of the erroneous statement sometimes made that Scott entertained Byron at Abbotsford. He did, however, entertain John Murray at Ashestiel a few years earlier, when in 1808 the great publisher went down to Scotland to confer with Scott and others regarding the founding of a Review that should be a rival to the autocratic *Edinburgh*. Writing from Ashestiel to George Ellis, Scott had said—

"John Murray, the bookseller in Fleet Street, who has more real knowledge of what concerns his business than any of his brethren . . . . came to canvass a most important plan." Colonel Murray mentioned how his grandfather remembered as a small boy seeing the two poets, both lame, descending together the staircase at Number 50.

Byron, as we have seen, was on the most intimate terms with his publisher; and as the present generation is said not to read Byron, I shall give in full the famous verses—"My Murray"—written in Venice in 1818. They are a parody of Cowper's well known poem, "My Mary."

To thee with hope and terror dumb  
 The unfledged MS. authors come,  
 Thou printest all—and sellest some—  
 My Murray.

Upon thy table's baize so green  
 The last new *Quarterly* is seen,  
 But where is thy new Magazine,  
 My Murray?

Along thy sprucest bookshelves shine  
 The works thou deemest most divine—  
 The "Art of Cookery" and mine,  
 My Murray.

Tours, Travels, Essays too, I wist,  
 And sermons to thy mill bring grist;  
 And then thou hast the "Navy list",  
 My Murray.

And Heaven forbid I should conclude  
 Without "the Board of Longitude",  
 Although this narrow paper would,  
 My Murray!

(Venice, March, 25, 1818).

Probably there is no collection of literary relics outside of the great public museums and libraries which can compare in interest and value with that at Albemarle Street.

To complete the list of portraits, there is a miniature of Scott, done at the age of six, the earliest known portrait of the "Wizard of the North." The characteristic shape of the forehead can even at that early age be clearly discerned. A writing-desk belonging to Scott is one of the relics in this room. Besides a portrait of Scott by Stewart Newton, there is in the hall of Number 50 Chantrey's noble bust of the great Scotsman. There are also two small, coloured drawings of Byron, one by Harlow done in Venice in 1819, the other by Isola in 1823, just before he left for Greece, which indeed is the last known portrait of the poet-peer.

The literary relics in possession of the Murray family are as varied as they are beautiful. There is, for instance, a fourteenth century *Book of Hours* exquisitely and profusely illuminated; a thirteenth century Manuscript of the Bible; a copy of the First Folio of Shakespeare; Caxton's *Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*,—the first book altogether set up and printed in England; several holograph letters of Mary, Queen of Scots; a poem in French composed by Frederick the Great, in his own hand-writing and

signed; some MS. letters of Dean Swift; and the MS. of the journal kept by Gray of the *Elegy* while on his tour of Europe.

As might be expected, it is the Byroniana that are best represented; here are treasured the MSS. of all four cantos of *Childe Harold*; some of *Don Juan*, *The Giaour*, and a number of the shorter poems. We were shown the actual MS.—not any photographic reproduction, although such has been made—of the stanza Number 21 in the third canto beginning—"There was a sound of revelry by night", which forms the introduction to the famous description of the Battle of Waterloo. There lies before me a facsimile photographic reproduction of this page, showing the careless smudged handwriting, with erasures and interlineations betraying every mark of the utmost hurry in composition. It is evidently a first rapid version of the stanza, written where good paper was not obtainable and where a quill had to last a long time. In contrast with this fervid page, we were shown Scott's placid MS. of *The Abbot*, with page after page written close up to the margins without a single correction.

Apropos of the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, Byron addresses an amusing rhyming "Epistle to Mr. Murray" which opens thus—

My dear Mr. Murray  
 You're in a damned hurry  
 To set up this ultimate canto;  
 But (if they don't rob us)  
 You'll see Mr. Hobhouse  
 Will bring it safe in his portmanteau.

No. 50, Albemarle Street holds more Byroniana yet. One of the most interesting things we saw is a copy of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, with notes in the noble author's handwriting on the broad margins. These are chiefly of the nature of regrets for his youthful rashness in satirising many persons in the poem without really knowing much if anything about them. With admirable candour, he expresses himself as sorry for his unjust and unkind remarks on Scott, Jeffrey, Moore and many others. In one place he has written—"Nothing but the consideration of its being the property of another prevents me from consigning this miserable record of misplaced anger and indiscriminate acrimony to the flames." One correction is quite interesting: the words in the poem are—"Fresh fish from Helicon", to which Byron adds in a footnote—"Helicon is a mountain and not a fish-pond. It should have been Hippocrene."



Miller of Albemarle Street, as well as Murray, is brought into the *English Bards* in the offensive allusion to their having taken each one quarter of the copyright of *Marmion*:—

And thinks't thou, Scott, by vain conceit perchance,  
On public taste to foist thy stale romance,  
Though Murray with his Miller may combine  
To yield thy muse just half-a-crown per line.

How genuinely Byron regretted the wholesale attacks in the poem may be judged from the contrition expressed in a letter to Scott dated St. James's Street, July 6, 1812, in which this sentence occurs: "The Satire was written when I was very young and very angry, and fully bent on displaying my wrath and my wit, and now I am haunted by the ghosts of my wholesale assertions."

Besides a snuff-box which belonged to Byron, the famous drawing-room contains yet another relic, and one illustrative of a non-poetical trait in his extraordinarily complex constitution. It is a screen covered with portraits of the actors, actresses and pugilists of his day, selected by himself and put together with the help of Jackson, his trainer in boxing. The portraits of the pugilists are crude affairs, such as would be cut out of contemporary illustrated papers.

The Murray family are naturally fully alive to the literary and artistic interest of the contents of this renowned apartment, for their New Year's greeting in 1904 took the shape of a beautiful photograph of the drawing-room, with the following lines written by the present Mr. Murray printed on the card—

From the room where *Childe Harold* and *Waverley* met,  
Where warbled Tom Moore and the *Quarterly* set,  
Gifford, Croker and Borrow once wielded the quill  
To praise some new author or smash some Whig Bill,  
Where the bearers of many illustrious names,  
Such as Gray, Hallam, Lockhart look down from their frames,  
We greet all our friends with a "Happy New Year,"  
And a welcome whene'er they've a mind to come here.

In a souvenir of the centenary of Byron's death brought out under the name of Byron and John Murray in 1924, there is a fine reproduction of the painting by Phillips and of the statue by Thorwaldsen in Trinity College, Cambridge, along with a most successful sketch of the drawing-room, showing both the fire-place and the screen.

I may close this sketch of one of the most important houses in the history of literature in London by two quotations, one from

an account of the room by C. R. Leslie the artist, and the other from the pen of Hogg the "Ettrick Shepherd." "I had seen him (Lord Melbourne) for the first time years before in Murray's drawing-room in Albemarle Street. In that room Murray held every evening such levées as were not to be matched in London. Everybody who knew him, and had any business with him, walked into it without announcement or ceremony; and there were to be found all the most eminent authors and politicians of all parties drawn together by the common bond of literature."

Lastly, the words of the shepherd are few but graphic: "Eh, mon, it was such a dinner; and such drink as nae words can describe."

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## BY THE SEA

DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT

Why comes this sorrow from the outer void  
To check my heart with a vague agony  
When it would dance in pleasure unalloyed  
Or dream without desire or memory?  
Thus have I known the tide turn on a bench  
Of quiet rocks with loud, exultant sound,  
The sun-warm golden seaweed toss and wrench  
And triumph over them when they are drowned.  
Yet would I not command the tide to be  
Motionless water, nor by will restrain  
The current of vague sorrow, nor decree  
Peace to my heart from this reviving pain,  
Nay, I would cleave it open to the core  
For the remorseless surge to flood once more.