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New Light on Sir Egerton Brydges

I

WHEN Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges died on 8 September 1837 in the seventy-fifth year of his age, he was already almost forgotten in spite of a prolific output of poetry, fiction, critical works, economic and historical treatises, and antiquarian collections. The burning ambition to be known led him from one subject to another until he had produced more than 140 books, numerous contributions to periodicals and anthologies, and more than two thousand unpublished sonnets. Yet today he is barely known even to the experts of literary scholarship. Only the students of bibliography remember his *Censura Literaria* and his *Restituta* and the many similar volumes of interesting oddities of earlier English history and literature that would have been forgotten but for him.

Professor Mary K. Woodworth made a splendid effort to revaluate Brydges in her book on his literary career (1935), the only full-length treatment of the man ever attempted. She properly considers his antiquarian works as his positive contribution to the history of literature, yet she places her main emphasis on him as 'an example of the cultured taste of the time,' with his enthusiasm for melancholy poetry, his novels of sensibility, his zeal for older literature, and his 'sense of responsibility for public affairs.' [1]

Brydges represents all this, but there are other facets of his career that deserve further study. One of these is the literary criticism that lies buried in his antiquarian collections, in his unpublished letters, in his edition of English poets, and in such unexpected places as his *Imaginative Biography* (1834) and his books written in defense of Byron. Another rich source of new information lies in the comment on public affairs and public figures to be found in his more obscure works and in the voluminous unpublished correspondence. Richest of all, however, is the possibility of a biography that would be a re-

[1] *The Literary Career of Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges* (Oxford, 1935), p. 1. In her bibliography (pp. 169–184), Miss Woodworth lists 137 books and numerous contributions to periodicals and anthologies. About 100 of the books listed are at Harvard, as well as at least 6 works by Brydges not in the list, and much the greater part of the Lee Priory publications not by Brydges.

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markable psychological case study of an ambitious young writer full of zeal for converting the world who becomes frustrated at what he feels is unjust lack of recognition until he turns into a garrulous old man berating his own friends and parading his self-pity to the world in his books and letters. I have already analyzed one good example of this, Brydges' zealous defense as an old man against the attacks on the poetry and morals of the violent and youthful Lord Byron.[2] The ambition that drove Brydges to voluminous scribbling also led to his long and unhappy struggle to validate his claim to the peerage. He coveted fiercely the title that he believed belonged rightfully to him. He even added after his name on the title-page of later books '(Per legem terrae) Baron Chandos of Sudeley, etc.' Letters addressed to him simply as 'Lord Chandos of Sudeley, Geneva' were delivered to him. Aggravated by lack of recognition, such driving ambition combined in his later years with severe financial difficulties to make him a very unhappy man.

Much new light is thrown upon the background of Sir Egerton's unhappiness by a collection of unpublished Brydges correspondence recently presented to the Harvard College Library by the present writer.[3] By far the greater part of this collection, none of which was known to Miss Woodworth, consists of a series of letters from Brydges

[2] 'Sir Egerton Brydges on Lord Byron,' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, XIII (1950), 325–337.

[3] In addition to the letters described in this article (60 to his lawyers and 16 to him from Montagu Pennington), the collection includes:

(a) 74 miscellaneous letters of personal and literary interest to R. P. Gillies and the publisher Valpy, and to Brydges from many correspondents, including James Cochrane, Edward Churton, J. P. Rhoades, John Henry St Aubyn, Sir Thomas Strange, H. R. Yorke, the publishers Saunders and Otley, and (in French) various neighbors at Geneva (mentioned in *The Autobiography, Times, Opinions, and Contemporaries of Sir Egerton Brydges*, London, 1834, II, 117 f.)

(b) 17 miscellaneous business letters from Brydges and members of his family.

Other Brydges material already at Harvard includes: letter to Messrs Brace (?) and Plomer, 19 February 1809, on a legal matter; 6 letters to John Mitford, 1813–14, concerning Mitford's edition of Gray; letter to William Pickering, 26 January 1832, chiefly on Gray, but mentioning a plan for a new 'Lives of the Poets'; letter to Dionysius Lardner, 18 February 1832, declining to write a life of Collins for the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, etc.; memorandum, 27 March 1832, apparently to a publisher (William Pickering?), giving details of a plan for a new 'Lives of the Poets' and mentioning other schemes for publications; at least four books with Brydges' marks of ownership: John Thorpe, *Registrum Roffense* (London, 1769), Joseph Ritson, *Bibliographia Poetica* (London, 1802), Clement Barksdale, *Nympha Libethris* (London, 1816), Edward Phillips, *Theatrum Poetarum* (London, 1675).

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to his lawyers in London; these I propose to analyze with brief excerpts and supplement with additional illustrations from other parts of the collection. Most of the letters from Brydges to his lawyers were written from the Continent between 1819 and 1823, a voluminous series of lengthy letters addressed to J. S. Brooks, 10 John Street, Bedford Row. On the whole the letters to Brooks are querulous and petulant, with reams of tiny scribbling filled with self-righteous justification of his own actions and violent accusations of dishonesty on the part of his agents. The infinite ranting of this obsessed man would furnish interesting material for psychologists, but at the same time the letters clarify some of the paradoxes in Brydges' personality. For example, there are enough facts and figures here to enable a biographer to piece together the causes of Brydges' financial troubles, if he is interested. Best of all, however, these letters show us the man himself, not only in the wasteful garrulousness of his moments of stress but also in the valuable reflectiveness of his periods of comparative calm.

Even the best letters in this series to Brooks are too long to quote in full, and so it is necessary to summarize them and quote only those parts that throw special light on the writer and his times. For this purpose it is proposed to treat the material in two parts: (1) the purely personal and biographical; and (2) the comments on travel, literature, and philosophy. Since it was Brydges' main purpose to write Brooks about financial matters and since business at this time particularly excited his querulous nature, the excerpts revealing personality run throughout all the letters. But the more interesting comments on matters other than business are concentrated in the letters written while in Italy from 1819 to 1821. It is not surprising that the charm of Italy should have brought out this mellow sort of reflective writing, for Brydges showed that quality in letters of this period to other correspondents and, less intimately, in the two books based on these travels, *Letters from the Continent* (1821) and *Recollections of Foreign Travel* (1825). The surprising thing is that he should have written in this way to his lawyer, whom he abuses on other occasions with the strongest invective. Very likely he just wanted to write to someone at a given moment, and so he rationalized his actions by saying that his agent needed to know what sort of man he was. As he put it in his letter from Florence, 10 November 1819, his 'heterodox ideas of business' demanded that he let Brooks know what he was thinking about, in order that Brooks might 'gather, that ambition is not yet extinct in

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me; nor my self-confidence, and presumptuous dreamings utterly cured.'

II

The first letter of this series, written from Geneva, 7 February 1819,[4] contains a very revealing account of himself as he analyzes his disturbed state of mind and his attitude toward society. He found himself in a very nervous condition from trying to compose a letter: since it was 'impossible, when fatigued & nervous to make a transcript, without which I could not satisfy myself to send such delicate matter so distant a journey, I gave it up, & passed the night with all the *devils* about my brain, pulling & mauling as if they would not leave two fibres unmangled.'

He continues the letter with a long tirade against lawyers as the worst politicians and legislators. He comments on his manner of living in Geneva, where the ladies in his family have got along well:

> But I hate society! I had rather converse with my own thoughts, tho' they are often no better than a Hell! I dine by myself at one o clock: I use no exercise: I go to bed at 8 o clock. I grow bitter: and enjoy my *bitterness*! I anticipate the most gloomy prospects: I look to the times, when I am to be reduced to bread, and water! — & then, when by a *rebound*, when, old as I am, like a giant with his strength renewed, I am to *burst back again* upon the world!

The world will call this rant, he concludes, but he himself knows that he is talented, though nine out of ten who say so do not believe it: 'I am very well aware, that I cannot accumulate the materials of explosion, which are gradually collecting within me, without great danger, numerous privations, & final chances of being crushed. — It is true, I *may be* crushed! But I may as well die, *fighting*! It is quite sure, I shall be crushed, if I do *not fight*!'

From Florence, 10 November 1819, he continues his resigned attitude of the misunderstood genius: 'Nearly thirty (out of 57) years spent without a day of calm; without a day, in which I could be Master of Myself, — will sufficiently account for haste, inequalities, superficiality, errors!' The depraved public is to blame: 'The public taste

[4] Postmarked 'FPO Feb 16,' presumably the date received at the London Foreign Post Office. Similar postmarks on the letters from Italy show that it took 15–18 days for a letter to reach England from Italy.

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in a late age of society is almost always depraved. They live upon brandy: & high & corrupt seasoning.'

The next outburst is from Naples, 14 July 1820, as the result of desperate financial straits, which he concludes can only be solved by selling his estates at prices far below their value. On August 11 he writes that Falconet the banker has refused to cash his bills and he is in real distress. The Carbonari Revolution, which was going on in Naples at the time, had created disturbed conditions: 'clamours had begun: we could no longer get bread.' His last letter from Naples, September 30, is also in a very pessimistic mood. This letter is fourteen pages long, roughly 6,500 words, the first part a tedious justification of his past business actions, the longer second part a summary of his legal action in the past to gain a peerage. This letter is a fairly calm foretaste of the barrage of interminable letters of the same nature that were to follow from Geneva.

The first of these letters from Geneva, 4–5 October 1821, is still quite calm in its 5,000 words of self-justification presumably intended to answer some charges Brooks has made about his irresponsible nature. This letter contains some valuable biographical material about his relations with his son Barrett and about the disposition of his various estates. He summarizes his actions as resulting from what sounds like an anxiety neurosis: 'For the greater part of my life, I have suffered under a frightful sort of uncertainty and exaggerated anxiety, by *courting a sort of maze*, because I wanted the fortitude to *develop* it. This is indeed a fool's Paradise, from which I am resolved to make efforts to escape.'

In late November the deluge began. In one week's time he wrote four letters to Brooks, each of them fourteen to fifteen pages long, a total of over 25,000 words, a grand crescendo of abuse and sarcasm and accusations of dishonesty. The first of these letters, of November 23–24, is comparatively calm but firm in its accusations: he sees no reason why their differences cannot be settled peacefully, but if the occasion comes he will be ready with weapons of war. He does not wish to state his strongest arguments while there is a chance of amicable adjustment: 'But that adjustment must be quick & *complete*; or not at all! I cannot live many weeks in such a fever of mind!"

Next day there is a longer and much more hectic letter dealing with the subject of Barrett's accounts. Here the charges against Brooks become repetitious and often incoherent, and at times the abuse re-

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sorts to ridicule and sarcasm in a childish manner. In the letter of November 28, the abuse turns to pathological ranting that reveals his disturbed state of mind. In a rhetorical vein he boasts: 'The lion has been roused once, & put to an imperfect sleep again: he is roused a second time, to slumber no more.' He exultantly reveals that he has kept copies of every letter and all accounts, and that at the end of this long letter he still has not covered one twentieth of the business at hand.

Two days later, on November 30, he writes another voluminous letter with countless details reiterating his charges of bad accounts, and after a full day from 4:30 A.M. working at them the accounts seem to dance in his head like the witches in *Macbeth*. At the very end he sums up a number of charges Brooks has made against him, and the chief of them, that he is mentally incompetent to handle his affairs, cuts into his vanity: 'Then you feel assured, that I am an *absolute* & *unqualified* fool; & the Chancellor had better be prayed to take the management of my affairs out of my hands, as *non compos mentis*! . . . if you feel bold in this species of *rotten* protection, then the *hollow bugbear* must be pierced, & its real strength put to the test, ere it be too late!'

The very next day a short letter followed, admitting the possibility of error, and the next day after that a fairly sane and philosophical letter, in which Brydges notes that it has cost him fourteen sleepless nights and laborious days to tear to shreds the delusive mantle hiding Brooks's rascality, 'but at last the shreds are separated never to unite again!' On December 7 Brydges wrote again about his accounts and made serious charges of fraud against his agents; then that very evening the serious tone of accusation flamed into fury at being notified that Brooks had refused his draft. On December 10 another fifteen-page letter recounted in exhausting detail the way his agents had cheated him, the serious accusations mixed with playful sarcasm that is incoherent and childish. The final page gives a concise summary that threatens action in a court of equity and concludes: 'If you had gone on so, four or 5 years longer, you wod have had all mine & Barrett's — & *meant to do so*! including the livings for the Godly — to make schism-shops of! I have 40 objections beyond those already explained: but yr entanglements & ingenuities are so great, it employs all my days & nights to hunt you up!'

The climax of this notably hectic interlude in Brydges' life comes in two letters between Christmas and New Year. On December 27–28

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he wrote a letter containing twenty-three and a half closely written pages of further accusation and abuse, often in very rhetorical style like the ravings of an obsessed madman. Within the letter, however, there are two sprightly satirical dialogues and at the end ten carefully phrased legal questions. He followed this on December 30–January 16 with seventeen pages of petulant quibbling and further accusation that end with an abusive summary of the whole episode:

> When this extraordinary & most inexpressibly cruel conduct, roused me to enquire into the accounts; & endeavour to find out, how it could by possibility happen, that after the enormous sums paid into your hands, the state of the assets (or rather the deficiencies,) could be such, as to give colour to such harshness, when this inquiry even under such unbounded provocation, was still couched in terms of the most gentlemanly delicacy, how was I answered? By reproaches, denials, false facts, false law, badinage, scorn, contumely! . . . I can bring more than one of my own family to witness that, from Feb. to the end of April (1819) I was resolved to *break with you*! and to do that, which no power on earth shall any longer with-hold me from doing! — So (to make use of a slang expression,) you thought that you had completely "*diddled*" me!

Presumably nothing happened, and by 21 February 1823 Brydges was writing to Brooks in a calm and reflective manner on his favorite subject of economic theory, with comments on Adam Smith, Peel's legislation, gold as a basis of currency, and the relation of country banks to the Bank of England. In a letter of 6–8 August 1823, however, there is another violent flare-up, resulting in more than twenty pages repeating the charges of 1821 but with more incoherence of self-justification. Perhaps the clue is to be found in the depressed spirits he describes in a short letter of 13 December 1823, the last of this series, where he speaks of a feverish night and his health 'again growing indifferent in this *hypochondriacal, erysipelas-ical, insomniferous climate*!'

The tone of these letters makes it quite clear that it would have been difficult for the most scrupulous agent to get along with Brydges. Affairs between him and his lawyers got worse until they reached a crisis in the summer of 1826, when he returned to Lee Priory, where 'he finally discovered that he was wholly in the hands of his solicitors, Brooks, Grane and Cooper, and realizing that his fortunes were ruined, he became profoundly depressed.' [6] Both Brydges and the lawyers were

[6] Woodworth, *Literary Career*, p. 28. This whole episode is summarized by Miss Woodworth from unpublished papers in the British Museum and the Public Record Office.

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parties to the fraudulent scheme devised in 1829 that ended in a law suit lasting nine years. Brydges knew little about the details of the affair and what he learned made him turn bitterly to more letters of abuse to Brooks. Brooks was undoubtedly the chief deviser of this fraud, but it must be remembered that Brydges was very careless with money.

The whole situation is perhaps best summarized in an unpublished letter to Brydges from his old friend Montagu Pennington, the nephew and biographer of Elizabeth Carter. A series of letters from Pennington in the Harvard collection reveals an interesting picture of two old men corresponding between England and Switzerland, Brydges still petulant and irascible, Pennington scolding and brutally frank. In his letter of 13 September 1836, Pennington rebuked Brydges for his quarrelsome mood, especially in financial matters:

> That you have raised the large sums wch you mention I do not doubt; & that you have been cheated not only by your law agents, but by all those whom you have employed, is pretty certain. But you was a distressed man before you put yourself into Brooks's hands; you had bought extensive lands for wch you could not pay; the mortgages eat up the income of those estates, & you lived as if the clear income had been yours. But not a word of this is said in your Autobiography, nor of the real causes wch occasioned the little intercourse between you & your neighbours.

III

In his calmer moods Brydges wrote some very interesting letters from Italy, and the exhilaration of travel there seems to carry over into the letters to his lawyer. Even these letters are too long to be quoted in full, but a summary with fairly extensive excerpts will throw some light on at least two interesting topics, an Englishman's account of travel in Italy in the early nineteenth century and the remarks of an observant critic on literature and world affairs.

Brydges describes his enthusiasm for Florence in his letter of 10 November 1819. Now that some paintings have returned from Paris, the art treasures are much greater than in Eustace's account [6] of the city. The streets are better than those of Paris, all paved with flat stones, cheerful and clean. Brydges is 'strongly affected' by associations with the Medicis and with Dante. He has commenced the study of Italian literature as eagerly as he did French and hopes soon to be a

[6] John C. Eustace, *A Tour through Italy* (London, 1813, and later editions).

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'tolerable master of it.' Dante was his favorite Italian poet even when he had to read him in translation, though he also enjoyed Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, and Tasso. The middle portion of this letter contains a much more spontaneous description of Florence than any in his two-volume published *Letters from the Continent* (1821) and deserves extensive quotation:

Flocks of English are here. Lord Burghersh gives a Ball every Thursday; and the rooms are all filled with them. They move in multitudes, in a stream, from Paris to Rome & Naples. The metallic currency thus carried out of England, must at length become a serious drain of wealth.

We are much mistaken as to the cheapness of these places. Scarce any thing here is cheaper than at Geneva — Cloth & Taylor's bills are one third more even than in England — Nothing seems cheap but shoes: rent is high; but houses good.

The Opera here (of which the entrance money is indeed not 18^{d}. p^{r} head) is at present very bad — At Milan it was excellent: the scenery *there* surprizingly *brilliant*, such as the London & Paris theatres do not approach: & full of the richness of Italian invention.

But the whole of Lombardy from the foot of the Simplon to the foot of the Appenines is a close, flat, ugly country: of a deep, marshy soil, fertile in Agricultural produce; but as dull in scenery as can be concieved.

The passage of the Appenines is far inferior in grandeur of features to that of the Alpes by the Simplon: but yet it is very magnificent. A large portion is clothed with forest trees; upon which we look down from the summits, either covering the steep precipices, or waving across the undulating vallies. We slept one night upon these Appenines, at the little village of Covigliano. The day had been beset with rain & hurricanes of wind, which perhaps blew across from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic: and it seemed to me, that we were in some danger of having our carriages blown over into the gulfs, by the side of which our road ran.

Florence lies in a valley, (or rather perhaps *plain*, if it may be called plain, which is dotted about with inequalities approaching to hills,) on the South foot of the Appenines.

It is probable that Genius is a good deal influenced by *climate*. We cannot otherwise account for the superiority of Italian genius over that of our more Northern regions

By *Genius* I intend the legitimate meaning of the word: viz. the gift of *invention*: & of what is sublime, or pathetic; or beautiful. The French have little of this: though less Northern than us, they have much less than the English: but, in general, the English do not abound in it. We have therefore *few* real & legitimate *Poets*. Chaucer, Spenser, Sackville, Milton (perhaps *Collins*) are, except Dramatists, almost the whole. All of these caught their spirit from the Italian — by studying Dante, Boccacio, Petrarch, Ariosto. &c —

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As to most of our living *poets* (so called) they are mere illegitimate meteors of the day. The transparent & evaporated expanse of Southey; the high-worked & gaudy fillagree of Moore; the laboured & insipid tenuity of Rogers; the hard, obscure & unnatural metaphysics of Wordsworth, exhibit but little invention: or at least invention of the higher kind. They consist for the most part in the trickery of *style*: in the minor creations of *figurative* language.

The letters from Naples in July 1820 are so full of anxiety over finances and the effects of the Carbonari Revolution that they have little comment on Italy. The letter of August 11, however, makes a spirited contribution to the gossip about the scandalous reputation of Queen Caroline, the estranged wife of George IV, who had been living in Italy:

Surely there never was so bad a w—— as the Q. — Foreigners, in all the numerous Cities, &c where she resided, smile with ineffable scorn & ridicule; or stare with wonder at the blindness & audacity of English Faction, which can pretend to doubt the habitual, gross, & unblushing Guilt. Here she ran after *Murat* with a *furor*, which must have been almost insanity! — It is said, that she tried by bribery to get admission into his Palace masked! But she was not to the Ex-King's *taste*. Her impudence & folly seem to me even to exceed her other defects. It seems as if she not only was reckless of any confusion & bloodshed she might produce: but looked forward to it with vindictive & hellish delight! Ministers sho[d] have acted a bolder part. It was useless to tamper with such a Fiend!

In Rome he was at first enthusiastic, according to his letter of 17 January 1821, for Rome, he says, has finer art treasures than Florence as well as numerous libraries to gratify his literary curiosity. St Peter's is 'quite beyond the power of language to describe' as to form, proportions, richness, and uniformity. Rome is indeed 'the City of the whole world, which affords most to gratify the curiosity of a pure taste and a cultivated intellect.' He has learned to read Italian with facility and finds much to admire in Italian works of criticism, 'which in taste & genius far excell the English: and more especially the English, or rather Scotch, now in fashion: in which principles extravagant, meretricious, and radically wrong, are still worse perverted by national, political, and personal, added to mercenary, *interests*!'

In his letter of 28 February, however, he needs money and will be glad to get away from Rome as soon as possible. 'It is so very expensive — the Lodgings cost 7 Louis a week — At present the Austrian Army blocks up the road. But the air of Rome is dreadfully unsound — In

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summer no stranger can live here: and the Natives can scarce endure it.' The rest of the letter, about 4,000 words, contains tiny essays on politics, international affairs, economics, and literature, interspersed with a great deal of self-analysis as if to prove to Brooks that he is still mentally alert. Brydges summarizes his own situation in words that reveal confidence in his own ability:

> The man, who spends his life in heaping together materials, without attempting to build any thing of his own with them, is performing but a mean and humble, and perhaps superfluous labour! But I shall scarcely be taxed with this defect! — Everything passes through the sieve of my intellect; and a large portion is recombined, and re-amalgamated, by processes of my own!

The picture becomes clear now, and a pathetic one it is indeed. Accustomed to an easy life on his estate in Kent and to lavish spending on books printed at his private press at Lee Priory, he now finds himself in severe financial straits in a foreign land with seven young children on his hands. Author or editor of nearly eighty books by 1819, he believes it is his destiny to bring enlightenment to the world, but he is bitterly disappointed to find that the world does not want his work and that the depraved taste of the public will not allow him to be appreciated during his lifetime. He believes, however, that he must continue his literary designs, confident that the 'absolute charlatans . . . now in possession of public favour' will not be able to prevent his ultimate triumph. And he does continue to grind out his books, for in these two years in which he was writing voluminous letters of abuse to his lawyer he published two novels, three treatises on economic subjects, and four of his characteristic antiquarian compilations.

IV

The miscellaneous letters in this new collection of Brydges correspondence are on the whole too fragmentary to include here, but many of them are full of literary gossip and social history. For example, three letters written by J. P. Rhoades from Geneva in the fall of 1830 contain a great many anecdotes about literary and university figures, especially the poet William Collins and Dr Martin Joseph Routh, the President of Magdalen College, Oxford. Rhoades continues from Venice on 11 July 1831 concerning the political state of Europe, the horrors of a cholera plague approaching Vienna, and critical comments

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on Byron after reading 'the two last volumes of Moore's treason.' Another letter from England on 16 October 1831 reports on Sir Walter Scott's health after an 'introductory apoplectic stroke' and informs Brydges that publisher Murray would be interested in his proposed history of England only if it is a school book and written simply for children without any words like 'bastardized' that might lead to embarrassing questions.

A series of letters from the publisher James Cochrane in 1835 throw some interesting light on Brydges' reputation and on the vagaries of publishing at that time. Cochrane had been trying to get some sheets of a third volume of Brydges' *Autobiography* released by the publishers of the first two volumes. On 17 August 1835 he writes that he has obtained them but is disappointed to find them personal rather than literary: 'Of the thousand & one Characters & Anecdotes of the various illustrious individuals whom your Lordship came in contact with & which your Lordship's mind is known to be abundantly stored— very few are given.' On 7 October Cochrane reports that he is still anxiously awaiting the remaining third of Brydges' manuscript with reminiscences of literary figures, for the public awaits avidly free opinions by him of his contemporaries.

By far the most substantial part of the miscellaneous letters in this collection, however, is the series of sixteen letters from his friend and former neighbor, Montagu Pennington, all written from Deal in Kent between 16 October 1830 and 5 July 1837. Although passages have been cut from the letters, there is still left an abundance of interesting gossip between two old men about their writings and ideas. A few excerpts will give an idea of this richness, first on public affairs, next on literary subjects, and finally on the personality of Brydges himself.

Pennington was much concerned with the revolutionary character of the times; for this he blames the Whigs in his letter of 16 October 1830: 'I fully expect a revolution here also; but I think not yet. . . . For the moral influence on Society, the hold wch the Clergy, Magistracy, and Aristocracy in general, once had over those beneath them, is gone.' On 29 November of the same year he describes at length the state of unrest in Kent with the constant threat of revolution. The people sleep with loaded pistols, he says, the villages have nightly patrols, and all the large farms have watches; in Deal itself there has been little rioting but much threatening. On 4 February 1836, along with further criticism of the local government, he adds his prophecy of doom in

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national affairs: 'You & I are not likely to live to see it, but I firmly believe that Monarchy will *never* be restored in this country, & will soon cease in every other; in Russia the latest.' With all his criticism of public affairs, however, Pennington speaks charitably of William IV in his last letter of the series on 5 July 1837: 'We have lost too our good old King; a well meaning man I believe, with no great talents, but I think with the desire to do right. His death was christianlike & edifying.'

On literary matters Pennington is outspoken on his favorite prejudices, such as books in small print, like the Aldine Poets, and education for the masses. For example, on 29 November 1830, he observes that the huge sums spent on teaching the poor during the past thirty years have done little good; they learn to read Cobbett, he says, and to write threatening letters; they join the Cobbett Clubs such as the one in Deal, but their morals are not improved. Byron is a suitable topic in January 1831 after reading Galt's life of the poet: 'Everything that is written of him tends to make his moral character worse & worse; and that wch they affect to conceal leads one to think that *improbius quiddam* is still behind. His life is a disgrace to genius, tho' I have always thought his over-rated.'

He finds Coleridge's principles unfixed, like those of most metaphysicians ('both he & Lamb have been puffed beyond their bearing'). He expected more from Croker's edition of Boswell's Johnson and offers the editor criticism and some anecdotes. He is much pleased with Bulwer-Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii* but often disappointed in Southey's *Doctor* as a bad imitation of *Tristram Shandy* ('the style is not Southey's, who is, I think, our very best prose writer'). He distrusts the great popularity of Robert Burns in his letter of 21 April 1836: 'Now I do not mean to deny his being a poet, but I think he has had his full share of fame — But the Scotch were so proud of him that they pushed him on with the whole power of the nation.'

The personal revelations in Pennington's letters, however, are the fullest and in some ways the most interesting. His merciless analysis of Brydges' weaknesses must have been painful indeed to both men, but the subject returns again and again to fill out the unhappy picture already revealed in the letters described earlier in this article. Pennington's view of his friend's defects is so clear that Brydges is left with no props, yet we can easily imagine his replies of long-winded self-justification.

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The very first letter, 16 October, 1830, contains a sane judgment in a charitable tone: 'I think you would have made a keen discerning lawyer; but I am *confident* that all you have ever wanted to make you a popular & celebrated writer is to have been under the necessity of living by your talents.' After 1834 the letters are full of rebukes of Brydges' 'querulous tone' centering around complaints that the recently published *Autobiography* had not been better received in England; even the former neighbors at Deal and Canterbury have said nothing about the book, 'and they who have not known your career personally, will be no better acquainted with your real history after reading it than they were before.' By 3 December 1835 Pennington complains that their correspondence has become useless, and on 8 July 1836 he reproaches Brydges for putting words into his mouth and then quarreling with him on the subject. On 23 August 1836 he writes a long and interesting censure of his friend's querulous self-justification; he allows that Brydges has talents and genius, but he can never agree with him on moral subjects because of 'the violence of your enmities, & your throwing blame upon every one but yourself, with respect to the ruin of your affairs.' The climax comes in Pennington's analysis of Brydges in his letter of 13 September 1836, where he prefaces the judgment I have quoted earlier [7] with this blunt statement: 'What pleasure you can find in a correspondence carried on as ours has lately been I cannot guess; but I must own that it is none to me. You write to me about scarcely anything but yourself; when I do not reply & notice your opinions you are displeased, & when I do you think yourself ill used.' And yet the correspondence continued for almost another year, ceasing only with Brydges' death.

The interchange between these two old men tells a pathetic story of human relations; it is indeed a fitting commentary on the restless ambition of Sir Egerton Brydges that was so mercilessly revealed in the letters to his lawyer. The pieces now fit together: the endless scribbling in his printed works, the fight for his claim to the peerage, the defense of the morals of Byron, and the ranting accusations against his lawyers. Even as Brooks had always been wrong in handling his financial matters, so in his literary career the critics failed to appreciate his genius because their taste was vitiated by their search for what he called the 'false sublime.'

Brydges can sincerely justify himself, and all the more vehemently

[7] P. 109.

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because his many ventures have turned out to be futile. In his own mind he knows that he is really Baron Chandos of Sudeley, a great poet who has shown himself more than competent as novelist, literary critic, economist, political theorist, and bibliographer. Posterity, he feels, will prove him right.

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