BYRON’S BULLDOG

The Letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron

Edited by Peter W. Graham
Corrections to the text:

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John Cam Hobhouse (1786–1869), later Baron Broughton de Gyfford, was a man of many talents who distinguished himself as a writer, Radical reformer, and Whig statesman. In his youth, however, Hobhouse's energies and emotions centered on his friendship with Lord Byron, the fascinating poet Lady Caroline Lamb so dramatically characterized as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know." Byron and Hobhouse endured and enjoyed Cambridge together, traveled as companions through Greece, Albania, and Turkey, and together made their way in the rackety London world of publishers, pugilists, politicians, dandies, duchesses, and debutantes. Hobhouse served as best man at Byron's ill-fated marriage, stood staunchly as Byron's partisan when that alliance dissolved, and, as the poet's man in London, tirelessly expedited literary, financial, and personal affairs for his self-exiled friend.

Byron once termed the tenaciously loyal Hobhouse "my best and dearest friend," and their candid, witty, not always cordial letters to one another constitute the longest sustained and one of the liveliest of Byron's correspondences. Professor Graham's edition of Hobhouse's more than one hundred letters to his friend—many of which have not previously appeared and most of which have never before been published in full—gives a voice to the hitherto silent half of one of Byron's most colorful and engaging epistolary conversations.

One of the commonplaces of Byron scholarship has been to reduce the friendship of Byron and Hobhouse to a conjunction of opposites: libertine and moralist, poet and pedant, Hamlet and Polonius, or damned archangel and ordinary mortal. As Graham points out, however, the outsider who endeavors to see Byron and Hobhouse as they were is struck more by resemblances than by polarities. For all their disagreements, Byron and Hobhouse were drawn together and held together by affinities. Even the major differences between them seem to be matters of degree rather than of kind.

(Continued on back flap)
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