

SELECTED POEMS

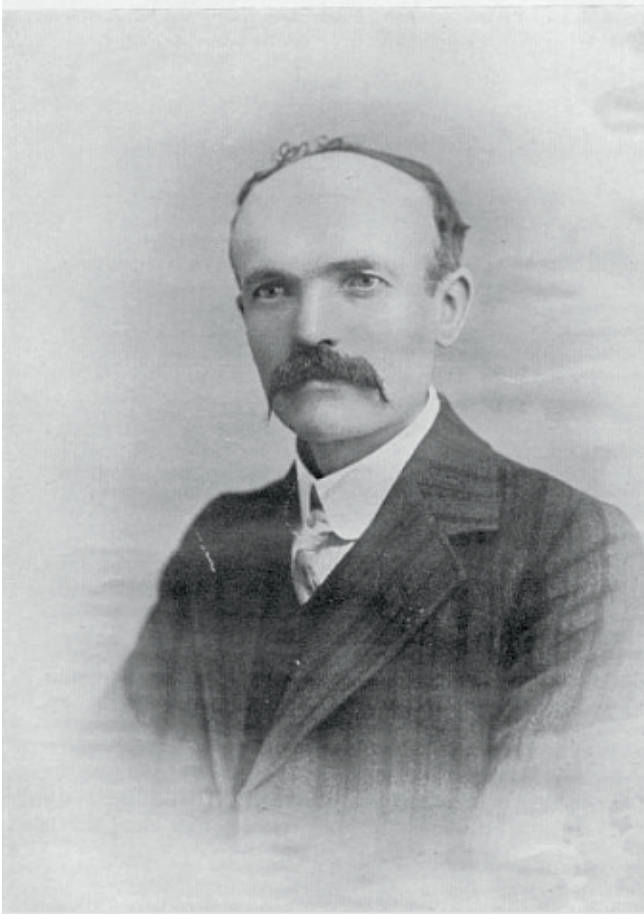
BY

YAHYA PARKINSON

(1874-1918)

*The first British
Muslim poet*





YAHYA-EN-NASR PARKINSON

Introduction

JOHN PARKINSON, who was to become the founding father of British Muslim poetry, was born in Kilwinning (Ayrshire) on February 17 1874. The birth register gives his parents' names as Samuel Parkinson and Margaret Jane Clockie. Both born in Ulster, in the County Down, they were presumably descendents of North of England migrants to Ireland, whose privileges under the ascendancy did not prevent them from moving to Scotland. Their marriage certificate indicates that they were married a bare five weeks before John's birth; we can only guess at the circumstances, but although both were employed - Samuel as a quarryman and Margaret as a dressmaker - they were clearly in financially difficult circumstances, living at Margaret's parents' small house at 9 Byres Road, Kilwinning, which was to be the Muslim poet's home for

the remainder of his life. Seven months after the birth Margaret died, apparently from consumption, and Samuel abandoned the child, returning to Northern Ireland, where he remarried and had five further children. John was thereafter brought up by his grandparents. When these died, in 1889 and 1890, he began to live alone in the house, aged, at this time, only sixteen.

Two years earlier Parkinson had found work in the factory of the Busby Spinning Company, in whose employ he remained for the rest of his life. He had received only a very basic education, but appears to have read voraciously on a wide variety of subjects. One of his obituaries, in the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, was authored by the man who seems to have acted as his mentor, Dr. A. Milroy, a local physician and dentist. The acquaintance began, Milroy writes, when the teenaged Parkinson asked Milroy's permission to position his small telescope in his garden, which was 'favourably situated for sidereal observations'. The young man showed Milroy a range of astronomical marvels, including the moons of Jupiter, double stars 'of various colours, the nebulas and other wonders in the depths of infinity'. In return, Milroy began to teach Parkinson Greek, and later recorded that 'to my utter aston-

ishment he mastered the grammar in a few weeks and within six months was able to read Homer fairly well, and even quote him in his conversations.’ From Greek he moved on to Ancient Egyptian, and then Arabic. Milroy recalls his strong powers of memory: after hearing a page of Locke or Browning only twice, Parkinson could repeat it from memory. A further interest was botany, and he began to write essays on the flora of Ayrshire for the local press. When not at the mill, he would roam the surrounding countryside. Nature was his inspiration both as an amateur scientist, and as a thinker searching for truth. His classrooms were, as he wrote:

the green fields and valleys and woodlands where, in the days of my adolescence, I roamed and dreamt and meditated and drew knowledge from the forms and movements, the aspects and the whisperings of nature. Where I knew the rush of the Garnock, the murmur of the Lugton, the river, the streamlet, the knoll, the birds sang, the bees hummed, and where every flower was familiar.

Parkinson also read extensively in literature, developing, like his contemporary Abdullah Quilliam, a combined love of the intensely local with the Oriental and

picturesque. He was to write a long poem, 'Ronald and Ellen', which indicates his passion for local history, and also, evidently, for Sir Walter Scott. The poem ends with a scathing denunciation of the English atrocities. In fact, Parkinson remained through his life a strong Scots patriot, reflecting as follows:

Love of country is a feeling that one would scarcely attempt to analyse, although it seems partly due to heredity and partly to environment; but, however that may be, it seems deeply woven into the life-soul of most of us.

Some of his poems were considered impressive enough to merit inclusion not only in local newspapers, but in regional anthologies, such as John Macintosh's book *Poets of Ayrshire, from the Fourteenth Century to the Present Day* (1910).

'Ronald and Ellen', like many of his early poems, has a martial theme, and the chivalric principle was an important element in his attraction to Islam. Perhaps his best-known publication, *Lays of Love and War* (dedicated to Milroy), expounds the magnificence of selfless heroism. The admiration for Arab cavalier virtues stayed with him all his life; but following the various crises of Turkey in Europe in 1905, 1908 and 1912, he developed a passion for

the Ottomans also. He wrote an epic versified history of the Ottoman Empire, which Abdullah Quilliam showed to Sultan Abdul Hamid, who thereupon conferred upon Parkinson the Imperial Order of the Medjidieh (Third Class), and had the poem translated into Turkish. Like all of Parkinson's book-length poems, including his *Life of Saladin*, this text appears to have been lost, although further work in the Yıldız Palace archives might still turn up a copy.

The title of *Lays of Love and War* indicates a romantic as well as a heroic interest. This is introduced gradually. One poem, which salutes the heroic genius of Khalid ibn al-Walid, then turns to a eulogy of the conqueror of Spain, Tariq ibn Ziyad (like Parkinson a convert, of either Berber or German stock):

Sing Taric's name,
His spotless fame,
Of Islam's chivalry the boast;
On sunny plain,
Of southern Spain,
He overthrew the Gothic host.

This introduces the third mood, as we move on from the early martial themes of Arab conquest, to a calmer

mood evoked in a series of evocations of the *dolce vita* of Umayyad Spain.

Cordova thou noble city,
 Splendour of Omayya's race;
Home of courtesy and learning,
 Seat of chivalry and grace.

Then some evocations of lively Arab womanhood:

HARK! The morning breezes sighing;
 Wake, my dearest love, awake,
That the sweetest zephyr blowing
 May thy raven tresses shake;
Wake, my love, for high Nevada's
 Everlasting crown of snow
Hails the morning's ardent kisses
 With a beauteous chiding glow.

Parkinson seeks to bring together the two great themes of European chivalry: courtly love and martial valour, and to locate their source, as some others were beginning to do, in the sophisticated culture of Muslim Andalusia. Hence he pretends to believe the Florinda legend, which describes how the Muslims invaded Spain to avenge the honour of a woman of Ceuta raped by an evil Visigoth-

ic king. Like the Greeks avenging Helen, the Muslims come, and justice is meted out.

Here Parkinson seems to be pointing his readers to a weakness in the European imperial discourse of his age. Victorian romanticism, gathering pace after Scott, through Disraeli's *Tancred* and a thousand lesser crusading yarns, coexisted with ambiguously changing attitudes to sexuality, and also with an Anglican Christianity whose scriptures preached pacifism, but which was now a church militant in which Lambeth and Westminster seemed natural partners in the project of Empire. Parkinson, with his clear head and his outsider's iconoclasm, rejected the Victorian hybrid culture of the imperial age, and posed a clear, provocative question: If Britain honours its martial traditions, and if it is now awakening to the value of *eros*, then Islam, not Christianity, is its natural religion.

It would help if we knew more about Parkinson's own private life. He never married, although we are told that at his graveside the girls from his factory wept copiously. Yet his emphasis, against Victorian puritanism, on the beauty and goodness of human desire makes his poetry a good deal less chaste than was normal in the chivalric romances and ballads of his time.

With this theory Parkinson developed a view of Islam as a natural religion for authentic human beings, who wish to partake fully in the gift of life. In its insistence on the rights of masculinity and femininity, and on the glories of nature, both botanical and astronomical, as proofs of God, the Qur'an expounds a religion which is both rational and humane. With this intoxicating vision of the world as God's gift, and with his wide and open-minded reading, his acceptance of Islam was only a matter of time. Although we cannot pinpoint the exact date of his conversion, in an article published in 1914 he indicates that he first contacted Quilliam's community in Liverpool in 1901, that is to say, in his twenty-seventh year. From that time on he was a regular and substantial contributor to Quilliam's newspaper, the *Crescent*, and to his journal, the *Islamic World*. He took a name of his own devising: Yahya-en-Nasr, 'Long Live Victory.'

Parkinson's view of Islam was complex but consistent. He had as a teenager joined the United Presbyterians, but soon found himself more attracted to the simplicity of Semitic monotheism, at which he may have arrived by way of a form of Unitarianism; and, as we have seen, he admired the Muslim love of life in an almost Nietzsche-

an way. Yet his studies, which progressed as he became a member of the British Astronomical Association and devoured biological journals, also made him an admirer of modern science. Despite his romancing of the Middle Ages, human progress is an important theme in his writings. Under the nom-de-plume 'Ingomar' he regaled readers of the local press with details of the latest scientific theories. He has a genuine gift for promoting what Oxford University nowadays calls 'the popular understanding of science'. In terms reminiscent of Teilhard de Chardin he hails the principle of natural selection and what he seems to see as the incipient twentieth century's rediscovery of humane values submerged by the early industrial age. But the true modern man stands apart from the masses, not only through his ability to reconnect with real humanity, through love and the manly virtues, but also through compassion and a desire for a more just social order. One of his best poems, 'Woodnotes Wild', laments the pollution of the Scottish glens by factory chimneys, 'sending forth the fumes of midnight', which seem responsible for the callow, unfeeling crowds which hurry to work or to empty pleasures.

Prostitution stalking shameless;

Womanhood in tattered garments,
Stranded wrecks upon the pavement;
In the gutter prone and sodden;
In a tawdry, drunken stupor,
Face and form no longer human.
While with heedless eyes averted,
Fellow-men are by them passing;
Scarce an arm is raised in helping,
For to stay them in their falling;
Not a word of fellow-feeling,
Voice unheard of mercy pleading;
While in thousands men are dying,
Sinking in the social vortex,
In a hell of lust and passion.

The answer to this degradation sounds Socialist:

Wake! ye lowly sons of labour,
Rise and boldly strike for freedom

Human happiness, salvation, is self-awareness; and self-awareness comes, as for Henley, through a process of upward struggle. Hence Parkinson's respect for Imam al-Ghazali. In a short book entitled *Al-Ghazali: A Psychological Study of the Man*, considered the first book on this

thinker in the English language, Parkinson, who sees Ghazali as 'the greatest thinker of his day, the greatest of the Muslims', praises his subject for experiencing and overcoming the inner traumas he recorded in his autobiography. 'The world riddle was before him', and he resolved it through intuition. As he writes: 'Intuition, the inner light, as the revealer of what Kant called things-in-themselves, was his final solution of the key to the world riddle'. Just as Kant destroyed the philosophical pretensions of Scholasticism, so Ghazali defeated Farabi and Avicenna, and took humanity forward. This was the true message of his writing: not a simple summons to repentance but a statement about the nature of being. Parkinson says that although 'his revolt was an ethical one, his position philosophically was always ontological.' Thus did he triumph over the later Spanish author Ibn Rushd. His authenticity was based on a pure-hearted vision intelligible to the masses, whereas Ibn Rushd was a mere elitist, a logic-chopper lacking in sincerity. Ibn Rushd copied his predecessor Aristotle and tried to capture Infinity with syllogisms; but Ghazali discovered truth through personal struggle, which, Parkinson says, 'gave an opening to any or all other modes of thought. Such a system was of

immense advantage for thought, for mental emancipation and progress.'

It is in his book on Ghazali, and further reflections on him in his book *Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, published in Rangoon in 1909, that we see the boldness and coherence of Parkinson's system. He identifies with Ghazali's outsider status: Ghazali is forced to leave the academy; Parkinson has never joined it; both men, by force of will and Divine help, find God by wandering in the wilderness and contemplating nature. Man finds truth by effort of will, and purges himself of error by the same process. Hence Parkinson's numerous refutations of Christianity, published towards the end of his life. In his article 'Sin-Bearers' he condemns the Christian idea of the vicarious atonement, controversially comparing Christian rites to sacramental and atoning practices among the devotees of Dionysus and Mithra. As he writes:

In later or higher stages of civilisation, as we have seen, bread and wine replaced the flesh and blood, the scapegoat ousted the human sacrifice. The scapegoat also passed away, and the Sun-god himself was fabled to have been crucified to save mankind, being resurrected on the third day and raised to heaven [...] Osiris and Dionysus die and rise again,

inspire chastity or self-purification, take away sin, and judge the dead at the Last Judgement. Bel, Marduk, Zeus, Helios, Artemis, Herakles, Khonsu and Horus, were all entitled mediators or saviours, or held part of the attributes of such.

As Parkinson concludes: 'By no such method can man attain salvation. Islam has swept that myth away.' Again, Parkinson has produced an interesting synthesis of Islamic classicism, in this case Ghazalian, with modern humanistic and vitalistic ethics, helped along by the modern historian's revisionist view of Christian origins. One recalls a certain type of mid-twentieth century Iranian philosophy, evinced for instance in Javid Hadidi's book *Islam and Voltaire*, or the revolutionary progressivist humanism of Ali Shariati.

Parkinson suffered from ill-health. A job on a newspaper in Rangoon came to an end as a result. Presumably he was excluded from military service during the Great War for the same reason. He joined a local Territorial unit in Kilwinning, and during rifle practice contracted the pneumonia from which, on 3rd December 1918 he died. Having no next of kin, his papers were soon dispersed, and his long epics on Ottoman and Crusading derring-do appear to have been lost forever, along, per-

haps, with other prose works. However further labours, perhaps in Istanbul, or the libraries of Rangoon where Muslim munificence seems to have seen several of his works into print, might yield an unexpected treasure. Parkinson died a century ago; but his pioneering soul is likely to speak to British Muslims, and to lead them forward, for years to come.

ABDAL HAKIM MURAD

POEMS

The North-Wind

In the cold and frozen northland,
With its ridges and its hollows,
Swept the North-wind all the Summer,
Waiting for the coming Winter
For to wake it from its slumber;
On the silent ocean sleeping,
Resting on its ice-clad bosom;
Where the Polar bears were roaming,
And the seals and walrus basking.
Slowly sank the sun to southland;
Passed the long, long day of Summer;
Shone the stars in all their splendour,
Like ice crystals in the ether;
With its silver lances darting
Thro' the circling constellations.

There in all its mystic glory
Blazed aloft the great Aurora.
Came the Winter, wild and stormy,
Roaring over lake and river;
Roused the North-wind in its fury
Sweeping o'er the ocean water,
Rushing southward in its madness
Over mountain, plain and valley;
Tore the leaves from off the plane-trees,
From the ash, and oak, and beeches;
Stripping all the flora naked,
Leaving but a phantom forest;
Broke in anger on the mountains,
Shrieked along the misty lowlands;
Wrapped the land in Arctic robing.
Garments of a dazzling whiteness;
Wind-swept hollows, wreathing snow-drift,
Barren peak, and roaring torrent,
Lonely pine-tree, dreary moorland;
Lake, and rivers, ponds and streamlets,
Frozen by its cold embraces.

The Zegri Maiden

The following lines are founded on an old Spanish-Morisco ballad. There is no attempt at literal translation; the central idea only has been retained:

Lay aside thy work Xarifa,
 Put the velvet cushion down,
Come and see our spearmen thronging,
 Thro' Granada's cheering town;
Come my sister, come Xarifa,
 Stand beside the lattice, dear,
You will see the Zegri horsemen
 Passing 'neath the window here.

Caballeros Granadinos,
 Trooping slow with stately pace;

At the head the young Andalla,
Chief, of warlike mien and grace;
What is wrong, my dear Xarifa?
Why the tear-drops in thine eye?
Come unto the window, darling,
Young Andalla passes by.

In his turban lady's favour,
Shades of violet and of white,
Woven by the hand of Zara,
He will wed with her to-night;
Put the cushion down, Xarifa,
Lay aside thy knitting now;
Zegri noblest princes riding
Chivalry on every brow.

Bid me not, my dearest Zara,
Put my needle-work aside,
Look with all the gazing city,
Where the Zegri warriors ride,
False of heart the Cid Andalla,
Gave to me his plighted vow;
Yet to-night he weds with Zara,
Flies her favour o'er his brow.

From Sons of Islam, III.

Cordova thou noble city,
 Splendour of Omayya's race;
Home of courtesy and learning,
 Seat of chivalry and grace.

From the fountains of thy knowledge
 Freshness flow'd to brow and coomb,
Clothing ev'ry vale and mountain
 With the tints of vernal bloom.

Gorgeous texture were thy garments,
 Deep perfumed thy flowing robes;
Limpid streams, 'mid musky gardens;
 Splendid diadem of globes.

Never has the breast of Europe
 Foster'd brighter child than you;
Fairer than the budding rose is,
 Purer than a drop of dew.

In the love of all thy mothers
 Chivalry at first took form;
And the milk drawn from their bosoms
 Was the passion of the storm.

Thy great Sultans were a necklace
 Strung with many sparkling gems;
Ruby brilliants, dazzling bloodstones,
 Tinged by Islam's vivid stems.

Noble were thy royal Princes,
 Arab blood in every vein;
Glory thou of their dominions,
 Cordova the Bride of Spain.

Verses

Half-hidden I lay in a hollow,
 'Mid the glare of the spears of the hay;
Above me twittered the swallow,
 As it glided and skimmed on its way;
Afar with a waft of its wing
 It threaded the air in its flight,
And the aerial sea, like a king,
 It breasted, a speck in the light.

High over me towered a ruin,
 In the tragical glory of years,
With dungeons that grass never grew in,
 But enriched with the splendour of tears;
On the top of the wall was a flower
 That was blooming alone 'mid the leaves,
Still wet with the breath of a shower;

And the swallows they built in the eaves.

Once again when the Autumn in glory
 Spread its gold on the brow of the year;
To that desolate tower so hoary
 I came with foreboding and fear;
And the scythe of the reaper had shone,
 And the gleaner had gathered the sheaves;
And the flower and its beauty were gone;
 And the swallow deserted the eaves.

The Poet's Dream.

By a ruined tower olden,
Lay the poet idly dreaming;
'Neath him fields with gowans golden,
O'er him skies were gently streaming.

Sparkling streamlets, foaming whitely,
O'er the cascade downward flowing,
On their lips red poppies brightly
In the sunshine beauteous glowing.

Sweetly summer it was breathing,
Blooming, balmy crimson roses,
Fairy fingers deftly weaving,
Spreading carpets, bunching posies.

Laverocks in the sky were winging
 Dark against its silver brightness;
And to earth were clearly singing
 Lyrics of a tender lightness.

Here and there a covey started,
 From a rugged knoll of heather,
Here and there a blackbird darted,
 Glitt'ring suns on every feather.

The Spirit of God

On the perfume of flowerlets in the dell,
On the white sea-foam on the ocean swell,
On the shivering lances of silvery light,
On the shimmering sunbeam's arrowy flight,
The Spirit of God is nigh.

Through the ebony night's amorphous veil,
Through the feathery clouds, the starlight pale,
Flutters to earth; and the glimmering rays
Of the gibbous moon, singing His praise,
The Spirit of God in the sky.

On the silent lake, in the limpid stream,
In the quiet sleep, in the feverish dream,
On the howling storm's tempestuous breast,
On the balmy air, dreaming, at rest,

The Spirit of God rides high.

Where droning bees their nectar sip,
Where poppies hang o'er the river's lip,
Where the red, red cheek of the roses blush,
Where the flaming cups of tulips flush,
The Spirit of God doth lie.

Abd-El-Kader

No Chevalier more courteous and refined
 Of Arab blood, e'er stood on battlefield;
The victor's palms around his turban twined'
 No spot upon the argent of his shield;
Europe has owned no gentler, doughtier knight,
 No better fought for Bourbon, Stuart or
 Guelph,
E'en Bayard paled before his generous might;
 The Sultan was nobility itself.
Triumphal arches were not his desire,
 Nor yet the warrior's wondrous pageantry;
But, forced to raise his hand in martial ire,
 He trod with power the conqueror's,
 statesman's way;
 No nobler man for Islam's honour drew
 No finer soldier drank the battle brew.

The Dirge We Dirging Dree

*A birth,
A momentary dash,
A blaze of sunshine,
A cloud of melancholy,
A parting gleam –
Then death.*

Like to drift of the drifting tide,
 To scud of the scudding sea,
To billows on the billowy wide,
 Is the dirge we dirging dree.

Like to lash of the lashing hail,
 The breath of the breathing sea,
To fiery dust when on dusty trail

Streams of streaming star-shot flee.

Like to drone of the droning blast,
 The moan of the moaning bay,
To the shadow of shadows cast
 By beam of the beaming day.

Like to white of the whitest light,
 Deep scent of scented flowers,
To the black of the blackest night,
 Black musk of musky bowers.

Like to 'plash of the 'plashing stream,
 Red-gold on a golden hair,
To the fever of feverish dream,
 To balm in the balmy air.

To the break of the breaking wave,
 To wave of the waving tree,
To the still of the stilly grave,
 Is the dirge we dirging dree.

Woodnotes Wild

Often have I wandered lonely
In the woodland 'mid the lime trees;
Where the solitude was deepest;
Thro' among the waving brackens,
Or amid the rhododendrons;
Plucking blossoms of the hawthorn,
Pulling flowers of honeysuckle;
Where the sparrows they were chatt'ring,
And the blackbirds loudly whistled,
Far away from busy cities
With their smoky air, and chimneys
Reaching skyward, tall and spiry;
Sending forth the fumes of midnight,
Air polluting, fitful breathing.
From the traffic thunder rolling,

In the daytime, in the night time;
Always streaming 'long the pavement;
Never ending, trampling, trampling;
Busy thousands ever going
Ceaseless o'er the stony pathway.
Some with careless print of manhood
Written on their laughing faces;
Thinking on their past enjoyment.
Or of joys that lie before them;
Life to them is but a playtime;
Dreaming not of future sorrow,
Or of tortures, pains, and hardships,
That the flying hours are bringing.
Pale-faced men and sickly women
On the seething river drifting,
At the mercy of its waters;
Now engulfed within the vortex,
Now upborn upon the billows;
Ever striving, ever struggling,
To evade the fate before them;
Prostitution stalking shameless;
Womanhood in tattered garments,
Stranded wrecks upon the pavement;

In the gutter prone and sodden;
In a tawdry, drunken stupor,
Face and form no longer human.
While with heedless eyes averted,
Fellow-men are by them passing;
Scarce an arm is raised in helping,
For to stay them in their falling;
Not a word of fellow-feeling,
Voice unheard of mercy pleading;
While in thousands men are dying,
Sinking in the social vortex,
In a hell of lust and passion.
Why this misery and anguish,
That the people they are bearing;
Why this crying, this despairing;
Are not Nature's bounties spreading
Wide along the earth so spacious;
With a lavish hand she's casting
Food in plenty for the gleaning;
Why should people grind their brothers,
Trample them like armies marching
O'er a field of mangled foemen?
Shall the earth upon its journey

Spinning onward through the ether;
With its heavy weight of sorrow,
Spin from age to age forever;
Men make slaves of fellow-creatures.
Wake! ye lowly sons of labour,
Rise and boldly strike for freedom;
Has the past's ignoble serfdom
Brought ye to such low debasement,
So crushed out your aspirations
And enslaved your budding manhood,
That ye fear to raise your voices;
Fear to stand for truth and honour;
For the freedom of the lowly?
We have not the blood of Normans
Glowing warm with every throbbing,
Pouring through our hearts' strong chambers;
But we have the strength of duty,
And an inborn love of freedom
Strongly surging in our bosoms;
And we have a blest intuition
Of a something far diviner,
Than the slaving of the nations,
Or the crushing of a brother:

Hearts have we alive to pity;
And emotions that are truest
To the mothers dear that bore us;
With a thought for one another,
And a love for even the lowest
Of the things upon earth's surface;
In the mountains or the valleys,
In the densest of the jungle,
On the sandy wastes of Afric,
And the hills of Hindustani.
Pioneers of thought and progress
Raise your standards high and higher;
Give your banners to the tempest
Tossing folds before the people.
What care we for lightnings flashing,
Or the rolling thunders pealing,
In the forefront of the army
Of the pioneers of freedom?
On ye leaders of the vanguard!
Wheel your forces into action;
See the purple shades of morning
Flaming thro' the night's dark tresses;
Steady ye the men of action,

Steady for the furious onset,
Banners waving, weapons gleaming;
Hand to hand the foe encounter;
Voices raising to their loudest,
Teachers of a true evangel.

From the city labour ridden
To the forest, to the mountain;
Be at one with singing nature,
In the mystic base of substance,
In the all-absorbing ether;
Drinking in the boundless nectar;
Breathing air, free, unpolluted;
Standing on a wind-swept mountain
With the winds about you playing;
With your naked bosom breasting
Surges of the aërial ocean;
Not for us the humming city
With its reeking filth of slumdom,
Full of dirty courts and alleys;
Fashioned by the guilt of ages,
Degradation of the people.
Let us to the lonely streamlets,

Let us to the woods and valleys;
Where the plane-tree spreads its branches;
Where the stormy winds are rushing
Thro' the sycamores and cedars,
Thro' the lime trees and the willows;
When the Autumn spreads its glory,
Turns the leaves to brown and golden;
When the river fitful gushing
Rushes 'neath the drooping willow;
Beating 'gainst the lowest branches,
And in mimic whirlpools running;
In the centre of the current
Where the water surges strongest;
Bends its bosom like a bowstring,
As it dashes in its fury
Onward thro' the reeds and sedges;
Leaping free to kiss the willows;
Like a serpent, twining, gliding,
On to where the winds are reeling
On the bosom of the ocean;
On to mingle with its waters;
Where a scene of wintry sunset
Bursts upon the wond'ring vision;

Skies enwrought with crimson lining,
Fields of yellow, lake, and purple;
Lighted by the fiery ashes
Of a thousand Krakatoas.

There is nought on earth so noble,
Nothing so divine and holy,
As the strongest of the passions;
That awakes within our bosoms
Love for every sentient creature;
And for every wild flower blowing,
Waving in the summer breezes,
On the lofty top of mountains,
Or within the shady hedgerows,
Or secluded depths of valleys;
Poppies growing on the hillside,
Roses blooming in the garden,
Tenderness in every action,
In our dealings with our fellows;
And a deep responsive feeling
In their joy and in their sorrow;
Sympathy with every being,
With the poorest and the lowest,

With the sickly and the needy;
Looking on them as our brothers.
Love it is the highest ideal
That the human mind can rise to;
Nobler far than states or principedoms,
Or the sovereign rights of empire;
Empires are but transient glories
Worn upon the brow of ages,
Hollow mockeries of a grandeur
Only glittering on the surface.
'Way with such a fleeting glory;
Give to us the love that's lasting,
As the earth on which we're living
As the heavens in its beauty,
As the star-lines in its brightness,
Or the star-depths in its deepness;
Spacious as the very cosmos,
Bounded not by earthly limits;
Love far greater than a mother's
Who will die to save her offspring,
Give her life for their protection;
Not a love the tiger knows of,
Or the lion in the desert,

Or the bird has for its young ones;
But a love as comprehensive
As the human thought can fathom.
Only they alone are righteous
Who have love for all their brethren,
In this sphere of pain and labour;
And for every moving creature
Living on the world's wide body;
Love divine and everlasting;
Deepest of the soul's outpourings,
Breathings of a thing diviner
Than the swimming, glowing cosmos;
Than the blaze of constellations
Showering star-dust through the spaces;
Flower of all the human yearnings
For a better frame of spirit.
Give us but the power of living;
Teach us we are one with nature,
Part and parcel of the mountains,
Of the rivers and the ocean,
Of the air and rustling plane-trees,
Flowers and earth and ocean fauna;
We by Nature's bonds united
Like the stars to one another.

Granada

Fair Granada, flower of Islam,
 Planted by a martial hand,
Tend'rest bud that ever blossomed
 In the soil of western land.

Dark the eye of fearless scion,
 Bright the flash of curving blade;
Fairer still the favour waving,
 'Gainst the gold of turban laid.

Tossing plume of gallant Zegri,
 Gleaming tahali of knight;
Pride of all thy race, Granada,

Bravest of thy sons in fight.

Loudly rings the *tekbir* rolling
 Deep along Nevada's side;
O'er the Vega steeds are prancing,
 Eastern emblems spreading wide.

Noble chevaliers of Islam,
 In their veins the blood of kings;
Knightly were their spears in battle,
 Gentlier still in tourney rings.

Long your deeds, illustrious Sayyids,
 Andalusia's mighty line;
Shall emblazon Muslim banner,
 And around our hearts entwine.

The Rape of Florinda

A palace on the Tagus stood, a noble pile,
Built by Don Roderic in Gothic style
To gratify the wishes of his Queen:
The turrets mocked the morning with their sheen;
The song of birds resounded on the air,
Perfume of flowers of fragrance rich and rare;
While gushing fountains tossed their mimic sprays
And tiny cascades murmured songs of praise;
In leafy bower and grove the crooning dove
And maiden fair re-told their tales of love.
In this abode, with its enchanting bowers,
The Gothic monarch whiled away the hours;
The pleasures of the table had their charms,
He thought his kingdom safe from foreign arms;

In weak indulgence all his time was spent
And idle courtiers' festive merriment;
Degenerate nobles held him as in thrall
And their example brought about his fall;
The sensual passions that had dormant lain
When first his sabre made him lord of Spain,
Now sapped by pleasure, passed beyond control;
Luxurious life had seared the sovereign's soul.
One summer day, in noontide's scorching ray,
When silver Tagus murmured on its way,
And Nature languished in the sultry heat,
And lazy courtiers sought a cool retreat,
Where grassy slopes 'neath orange trees were laid,
And arbors, myrtle-covered, sank in shade;
To where his Consort's own apartments lay
Don Roderic was constrained to wend his way,
Altho' those private chambers scarce had known,
The voice of man, for woman's voice alone
Those gorgeous arcades, fairy gardens knew,
Where beauty's rarest treasures, fairest grew.
While passing by an alcove, on his ear
The sound of merry laughter rippled clear;
And tho' an eastern casement almost hid
An overgrowth of jasmine flowers amid;

Still thro' the overhanging flowery maze
A scene of beauty met the monarch's gaze.
Around a fountain in an orange court
His Consort's damsels in the sun disport;
Some plucked the myrtle, others ivy twined,
And some asleep on grassy sloped reclined;
And some within the fountain's sparkling wave
Their lithesome limbs with cooling waters lave.
The busy voices told discussion raged,
And some keen rivalry the point engaged;
Among the women of the east and west
Each claimed her nation as the handsomest;
And to maintain the point with fingers deft,
Each maid in haste in twain her garment reft;
The proudest beauties of the Gothic Court
Revealed a row of shining limbs in sport.
Amid the group a Mauritanian maid
A form majestic on the lawn displayed;
A slender waist and finely-curving hip,
And limbs unrivalled in their workmanship;
Eyes dark as sloes that languid lashes crown,
And ruby lips, with skin a deep nut-brown;
And mingling with her cheek's nut-coloured hue
A tinge of crimson roses kindled thro';

In due proportion rose each dusky mound,
Her supple figure seemed to skim the ground.
Amid España's beauties gathered there
Could any with the Moorish maid compare?
They soon bethought themselves, those damsels gay,
And turned to where the young Florinda lay
Asleep upon a bank. The glow of health
Upon her cheek bestowed an ample wealth
Of loveliness; and youth and innocence
Their lavish store of purity dispense;
Beneath her robe her bosom rose and fell
As gentle as the ocean's tranquil swell;
Her parted lips revealed an ivory set
As white as foam where angry billows fret;
To hide the orbs the eyelids strove in vain
'Behold!' they cried, 'the fairest maid in Spain!'
And in their eagerness to show her charms
Her dress unloosed; she started in their arms;
And thro' the casement bars the Gothic sire
Beheld a size that set his veins on fire;
Her cheek with mantling blushes burned and shone
As faintest sunrise blushing into dawn;
A matchless form as purest marble white

Disclosed itself unto Don Roderic's sight;
No maiden under Mauritanian skies
Displayed a pair of limbs like those fair thighs;
The swelling breasts in perfect contour rose,
And dusky vales in purple shade repose;
The wanton sunlight on her body played,
And every move her virgin charms betrayed;
No lovelier figure dazzled Paris' eyes
When naked Venus claimed the beauty prize,
And Juno strove to win the golden globe
And even virgin Pallas doffed her robe.
From that day henceforth with alluring art
King Roderic tried to win the maiden's heart;
Animal passions roused his sexual heat
And laid him captive at Florinda's feet,
But all in vain; no wanton woman she,
A virgin chaste of spotless purity;
Her silken lashes drooped whene'er he gazed,
The heaving bosom told of anger raised;
On either cheek a red-spot's mounting flame
Enhanced her beauty with a girlish shame;
His amorous glance no secret answer drew,
With each repulse his passion stronger grew;

One fierce desire alone his soul possessed,
To win or die upon Florinda's breast,
His midnight dreams unveiled her agile form,
And daylight visions only swelled the storm;
To conquer, conquer, was his only thought
In spite of all and whether she would or not.
And chance betrayed España's fairest flower
And placed her in th'adulterous sovereign's power;
No art would tempt her, and no wiles allure,
But force alone would make the victory sure.
Helpless she lies, distraught at her disgrace,
No arm to save her from the King's embrace.
In Afric land, where Moorish turbans stream,
Her father's lances shine and helmets gleam;
She feels his grasp, his hot breath fans her cheek;
Her lips go dry, she tries but fails to speak.
Seduced! A deed of shame is written now
Upon the Spanish monarch's guilty brow;
Florinda ravished by a perjured king;
But Fate shall speedy retribution bring;
As Helen, ravished by a Trojan boy,
Brought woes unnumbered on the homes of Troy,
The doom of Spain is writ in runes of stars,

Beyond the main; the threatening scimitars;
A narrow sea; a fleet of ships appears;
A one-eyed warrior and a host of spears;
A flowing river and a distant coast;
The marshalling squadrons of the Gothic host;
A shout of Allah and a rushing flood;
A crash of steel and thickening pools of blood;
They sink and die; the Muslim banners soar;
The rape's avenged, the Gothic rule is o'er.

Zengi

The sword you gaze upon my child,
 Thine eyes with eager passion scan;
Has flashed amid the tempest wild,
 Where Zengi led the Muslim van;
The jewelled hilt whose rays of fire
 Might scorn the glory of the sun,
The tempered blade whose touch of ire
 Made streams of deepest crimson run;
Unmatched on many a field of fight,
 But dimmed in many a battle won;
It made and unmade many a knight,
 For it was Zengi's own, my son.
Methinks I see his streaming crest,
 Like snow-white foam upon the wave,

Where'er the thronging squadrons prest,
 Amid the bravest of the brave.
Listen! and I will tell you, lad,
 The story of a soldier true.
No abler chief for combat clad,
 Nor better brand in danger drew;
When but a youth of fourteen years
 Sages revered his comely form.
He led his father's cavaliers
 In summer calm and winter storm;
His early days foretold renown,
 Predestined by the hand of fate,
Princes upheld his youthful crown
 Until he grew to man's estate.
It was a time of bitter strife,
 Of broiling day and night alarms,
Murder and plunder both were rife,
 And every Emir slept in arms;
Crusaders from the ferrine west,
 Imbued with mad religious hate;
Were rushing in fanatic zest,
 The Muslim to annihilate.
For Baldwin's brow the diadem

Of Palestinian empire bound,
The Kingdom of Jerusalem,
And hallowed Bethlehem's holy ground.
Their legions reached Diyar-bekir,
And surged around Damascus wall,
And Syrian blood besprent the spear
In fair Edessa's palace hall;
And rapine followed in their path,
The pestilence that famine bears,
Haran and Sidon felt their wrath,
And Tyre and Tripolis were theirs;
No lance to stay the fearful scourge,
Where Kedron's fairy waters flashed,
Nor champion's voice the Muslims urge
Where the Orontes droning dashed;
In vain the people sought relief
From fierce oppression's blighting breath;
And overcome by fear and grief,
Even the doughtiest prayed for death;
But all was changed when Zengi first
In battle couched Islamic spear,
And over the Orontes burst
On his victorious career.

His eye with battle fire aglare,
 His swarthy cheek with triumph flushed;
That blade, Damascus made, was bare,
 And with the blood of foemen blushed.
I saw him on Tiberias plain,
 In youthful ardour lead the van,
When blood distilled like winter rain,
 And Mandud led the Mussulman.
'Twas there he played a knightly part,
 And won his spurs on tented field,
And earned the love of every heart
 That homage will to valour yield.
'Mid western knight and Frankish peer,
 And Syria's martial Emir keen,
No more renowned cavalier
 Than gallant, young, Imad-ed-din.
I saw his mettled coursers prance,
 His banners with the Khalif lined,
When Dubeys and his Arab lance,
 On billows swept, incarnadined;
With daring heart Antar, the brave,
 Against him sped in proud array,
To break in pieces, wave on wave,

The finest swords of Araby.
I seem to see him once again
 Breasting the billows of that sea,
Beneath him dead and dying men;
 The Arab's choicest chivalry;
Before the Sultan's eye that hour,
 Of gentle deed and courtly grace,
The foremost on the run for power,
 Leading the veterans in the race.
It was not there he made his name,
 But by the Jordan's rippling wave;
It was not there undying fame
 Her wreath of greenest laurel gave;
It was not there he was revered,
 But by Orontes turbid tide;
It was not there his name was feared,
 But on the Jordan's western side;
He was the first the torch to light,
 And bid the European pause;
The first to meet the Christian might
 As champion of the Muslim cause.
I think I see the chieftain now,
 By dark Atharib's lofty keep,

The thunders lowering on his brow,
His eyes where lurid lightnings sleep.
I saw the warlike passion rise
Upon his brow as morning light!
I saw the fury in his eyes,
As lightning's thro' the darkest night!
The turbans glittered on the plain,
Amid the hills the battle flags;
The eagles swooping in our train
Forsook their eyries on the crags.
We challenged and the foe replied,
And long withstood us man to man,
For they were warriors picked and tried,
Of Normandy and Frankistan.
We met defiance with our mines,
And mangonels the turrets swept,
Closer and closer drew our lines,
Day after day we nearer crept.
Unto their aid with all his might
Jerusalem's Christian sovereign came,
He knew those sparks of transient light
Were heralds of devouring flame;
They came to meet us; 'twas the choice

Of Prince and baron, banneret;
And we, aroused by Zengi's voice,
For the assault impatient fret.
The cry, 'Give them a taste of Hell,'
Was answered from the frowning rock;
And then against the infidel
Our coursers bounded to the shock;
Into that sea of steel we rode,
As rivers pouring forth in flood
Our blades a brighter crimson showed
Than ever sprung from slavish blood;
Onward, as speedy as the wind,
Charge after charge the Emir led;
They rank before us, and behind
Ruin a tragic glory spread;
The falchions leapt in tongues of flame
Where'er our Arab coursers trod,
The bodies of our foes became
The scabbards of the swords of God!
But few escaped the martyr's crown
Amid the Frank and Norman peers;
The solemn, silent stars looked down
On red Atharib's rayless spears.

The Crescent of the Seljukees
 Was floating over every height,
The song of victory on the breeze,
 The clarion of the Islamite.
You yet may know the battlefield,
 For bones are crumbling there to dust,
And riven helm and battered shield,
 Are lying there defaced with rust.
Edessa, lad, his glory made;
 He toyed with Amid, to beguile
The spears of Jocelin; so delayed
 His march at Amid's gates awhile.
Deceived, they went, an erring band,
 And scarce defended left the town,
And we departed by command
 To haul Edessa's crosses down;
As reapers in the field of death,
 As brother Muslims side by side,
To guard the honour of the Faith,
 To bear the brunt, and turn the tide.
Onward to reap the swathes we went,
 Onward to pass the foemen's flank,
Unloosened rein and body bent,

Bridle by bridle, rank on rank;
Line after line the horsemen go,
 And head by head the chargers run,
With spears and turbans row on row,
 It was a wondrous sight, my son.
The Sun of Islam rose again,
 And on our banners flashed success;
We met the Franks in their domain,
 And paid them for their wickedness;
We stormed Edessa town at last,
 And vengeance whetted every blade.
For every insult of the past,
 A shambles of the place we made;
We would have razed it to the ground,
 Its turrets with the desert laid,
Destroyed its ramparts; but the sound
 Of Zengi's voice the slaughter stayed.
Our Emir's valour thro' the lands
 Was bruited by the Muslim's lips,
And unto distant western strands
 Was carried by the Christian ships.
And yet they slew him, slew the man
 Who from oppression gave relief;

No more his eye the battle scan;
 They slew him! Slew our peerless chief!
No more in front his turban shine;
 The' assassin's dagger pierced his breast,
No more his lance will lead the line,
 Nor sabre scourge the seething west.

Ronald and Ellen

A BALLAD

In a land of moor and heather
Where the blue-bell gaily blows,
'Mong the northern hills of Ayrshire
Where the rough-knolled river flows;
In the days when English Edward,
With a strong and heavy hand,
Left a track of desolation
Thro' our rugged northern land;
When our fathers 'mid the mountains,
For their freedom trial bore,
And a purple dyed their tartan
Deeper than the heather wore,
Lived a maiden where the river

Thro' the valley tumbles down,
Far beneath where yonder mountain
Buries in the clouds its crown.
Far above the foaming river,
Founded on a mighty crag,
Stood the castle where her father,
Tossed aloft his baron flag;
And the Lady's gentle beauty
With our foemen made a truce,
Far and near they came and sought her,
Peers of Edward, Knights of Bruce.
But her heart was with an outlaw
Hiding in her father's glen:
He had drawn the sword for Scotland
With her dauntless Highlandmen.
With her Lion, William Wallace,
He had stood on Falkirk field;
Where the gallant Graeme had breasted —
And his life did nobly yield.
Now the brackens were his pillow
And his plaid his coverlet;
While the blood of Scotland's foemen

On his claymore still were wet.

It is now the hour of midnight:
All is still within the hall,
But a few faint embers flick'ring
Casting shadows on the wall.
Safely now the guests may slumber,
England's doughty Peer and knight,
Edward on the field at Falkirk
Broke the power of 'Wallace wight.'
Screams the Eagle in his eyrie
On the crest of Misty Law;
Sleeps the warder at the wicket
Soundly on his bed of straw.
Silently a crouching figure
Steals across the earthen floor,
Noiselessly the cloaked intruder
Draws the bar of castle door.
As the heavy door swung open,
Inward rushed the nightly air,
Tossing back the flowing mantle,
Blowing loose a woman's hair.
Swift across the courtyard gliding

To the postern gate she bore;
Lay the warder soundly sleeping,
Safe she passes thro' the door;
With a prayer to heaven the maiden
Speeds adown the deepening glen,
Where the river Garnock thunders
Onward thro' a flowery den.
In a hollow, 'mid the bracken
With the night dew on his plaid,
Lay a kilted warrior sleeping
Close beside his naked blade;
And the Murray tartan o'er him
Lightly flung an ample fold;
In his bonnet eagle feathers
Bounded by a clasp of gold.
When a whisper thro' the stillness
Of the night air gently break;
'Are you sleeping, Ronald, darling,
Or is Murray's chief awake?'
To his feet the warrior bounded,
For a soldier lightly slept;
Soon the lovely Ayrshire maiden
On her lover's bosom wept.

For the chieftain tender-hearted
Caught her to his manly breast;
Underneath his heart was throbbing
With a lover's aching zest.
'Oh! my darling,' fond he murmured,
'Would that Scotland she were free,
For the hour of her rejoicing
Would our bridal bedding be.
Would the Northern Lion ramping,
Bore the Southern Leopard down;
And the ancient race of Albin
Wore once more the laurel crown.
Had our chieftains by their country,
Stood at bay with Wallace bold;
On the fatal field at Falkirk
Had a different tale been told.
But the traitors to their nation
Held by Norman feudal law,
In the cause of truth and manhood
Freedom's sword they feared to draw.
But a day will dawn for Scotland
Bright as ever rose of yore,
Where the line of great MacAlpine

Into fight her banners bore.
For her sons are yet unconquered,
Unsubdued their iron will;
From the lowlands they will gather,
They will come from highland hill.
Strong to stay the proud usurper,
And to tear the tyrant down;
On our throne to plant a scion
Of the ancient Celtic crown.'

'Dearest Ronald, pray forgive me
For this weakness; God, He knows,
That I love you and the northland,
Where the waving heather grows;
I would give my life for Scotland,
Tho' a woman weak am I,
Once again the Rampant Lion
Bear aloft or nobly die.
Go, and for your country perish,
Or victorious come to me;
If you fall in Scotia's battle
I will ne'er wed man for thee.
But my Ronald, I detain you,

On the Garnock turn your back;
For a sound rings thro' the valley
Surrey's hounds are on your track.
You must leave me now, my dearest,
Kiss me, Ronald, ere you go,
If you're doomed to die for Scotland
Let your face be to her foe.'
'Fare thee well! my darling Ellen,'
Said the chief, and seized his glaive;
'Where the English foe is thickest
There will Murray's tartan wave.'
For an instant to his bosom
Pressed her in a fond embrace;
Then, amid the woodland shadows,
Sped away with swinging pace;
Left her in her pensive beauty
All alone amid the trees,
Playing with her feet the brackens
With her hair the northern breeze.
And the moon was slowly rising
O'er a crumbling bank of cloud;
While the Garnock flood was dashing
O'er the rocks in thunder loud;

And the moonlight thro' the branches
Of the 'lacing greenery,
Fell upon her hair rich gilded
Like a sunset on the sea.

Now the Scottish lion's ramping
Highland eagles flap their wings,
And a mighty shout o'er Scotland
Thro' the welkin loudly rings;
For at last the clans are marshalling,
Gathering to the welcome strain;
Brawny Celt comes from the mountain
Springs the Saxon from the plain.
From the moss-hags pour the Kymry
On each cheek the battle glow,
With the Briton's blazing valour
Eager all to meet the foe.
From the border, from the highlands,
Aberdeen and wild Argyle,
Side by side with great Macdonald,
Lord of every western Isle.
To their foemen they have granted
But a single year of truce;

For the death-grip they are ready,
With the cry: 'The Bruce! the Bruce!'
On they come the southern cohorts,
Like a river foaming free,
With their shields and lances glitt'ring
Sweeping in a crystal sea;
Onward swept the inundation,
Wave on wave its billows rolled;
Every cuirass flashing sunlight,
Every helmet burning gold.
On! that living ocean flowing,
Desolation every turn;
Crashed at last on rocky headland,
Broke on spears of Bannockburn.
Where the billows surge the wildest,
And the spears in crimson start,
Rides a knight in sable armour,
Douglas of the bleeding heart.
Broken now the bows of England
Shivered the Plantagenet's lance;
O'er her ranks fierce Edward gallops,
And stout Randolph's horsemen prance.
In the forefront of the conflict,

'Mid the noblest of the land;
Where the Englishmen were thickest
Fell the Murray's highland brand;
And the gallant sons of Scotland
Dyed with blood her heather red,
And the day of her rejoicing
Saw brave Ronald's bridal bed.

(Untitled)

The rocks and rivers, stars and suns
 Repeat the same eternal theme;
The same unchanging process runs
 In starry drift and gaseous stream.
All things are aspects of a whole,
 Parts of causation's Sovran chain;
One law directs the human soul
 The meteors in the solar train.

* * * *

Before, behind, on every hand,
 Are pearls divine, of priceless lore,
To him who asks; at his command
 Nature will yield a lavish store;

The mount, the vale, the shrub, the tree
 And every flower in every dell,
The rushing river, sighing sea,
 And every soul a story tell,
And he who wills and can delight
 In seeking truth where'er it be

Will find the prize within his sight
 And learn the priceless prize is free.
No more the past shall trouble him
 No more the future cast a fear;
The present doth Nirvana limn
 And fairest vistas open clear.

* * * *

He who has drank the crystal tide
 Has triumphed over Life's decay;
The world's desires are cast aside
 He reigns immortal, lives for aye;
The mind is but a restless sea
 Where strong opposing passions start:
To know the truth is rich to be
 For truth is its immortal path.