

WHEN LALLA ROOKH WAS YOUNG

BY AGNES REPPLIER

"And give you, mixed with western sentimentalism,
Some glimpses of the finest orientalism."

"STICK to the East," wrote Byron to Moore, in 1813. "The oracle, Staël, told me it was the only poetic policy. The North, South, and West have all been exhausted; but from the East we have nothing but Southey's unsaleables, and these he has contrived to spoil by adopting only their most outrageous fictions. His personages don't interest us, and yours will. You will have no competitors; and, if you had, you ought to be glad of it. The little I have done in that way is merely a 'voice in the wilderness' for you; and if it has had any success, that also will prove that the public are orientalising, and pave the way for you."

There is something admirably business-like in this advice. Byron, who four months before had sold the *Giaour* and the *Bride of Abydos* to Murray for a thousand guineas, was beginning to realize the commercial value of poetry; and, like a true man of affairs, knew what it meant to corner a poetic market. He was generous enough to give Moore the tip, and to hold out a helping hand as well; for he sent him six volumes of Castellan's *Mœurs des Ottomans*, and three volumes of Toderini's *De la Littérature des Turcs*. The orientalism afforded by text-books was the kind that England loved.

From the publication of *Lalla Rookh* in 1817 to the publication of Thackeray's *Our Street* in 1847, Byron's far-sighted policy continued to bear golden fruit. For thirty years Caliphs and Deevs, Brahmins and Circassians, rioted through English verse; mosques and seraglios were the stage properties of English fiction; the bowers of Rochnabad, the Lake of Cashmere, became as familiar as

Richmond and the Thames to English readers. Some feeble washings of this great tidal wave crossed the estranging sea, to color the pages of the New York *Mirror*, and kindred journals in the United States. Harems and slave-markets, with beautiful Georgians and sad, slender Arab girls, thrilled our grandmothers' kind hearts. Tales of Moorish Lochinvars, who snatch away the fair daughters — or perhaps the fair wives — of powerful rajahs, captivated their imaginations. Gazelles trot like poodles through these stories, and lend color to their robust Saxon atmosphere. In one, a neglected "favorite" wins back her lord's affection by the help of a slave-girl's amulet; and the inconstant Moslem, entering the harem, exclaims, "Besshrew me that I ever thought another fair!" — which sounds like a penitent Tudor.

"A Persian's Heaven is easily made,
'Tis but black eyes and lemonade;"

and our oriental literature was compounded of the same simple ingredients. When the New York *Mirror*, under the guidance of the versatile Mr. Willis, tried to be impassioned and sensuous, it dropped into such wanton lines as these to a "Sultana."

She came, — soft leaning on her favorite's arm,
She came, warm panting from the sultry hours,
To rove mid fragrant shades of orange bowers,
A veil light shadowing each voluptuous charm.

And for this must Lord Byron stand responsible.

The happy experiment of grafting Turkish roses upon English boxwood led up to some curious complications, not the least of which was the necessity of stiffening the moral fibre of the Orient — which was esteemed to be but lax — until it could bear itself in seemly fashion be-

fore English eyes. The England of 1817 was not, like the England of 1907, prepared to give critical attention to the decadent. It presented a solid front of denial to habits and ideas which had not received the sanction of British custom; which had not, through national adoption, become part of the established order of the universe. The line of demarcation between Providence and the constitution was lightly drawn. Jeffrey, a self-constituted arbiter of taste and morals, assured his nervous countrymen that, although Moore's verse was glowing, his principles were sound.

"The characters and sentiments of *Lalla Rookh* belong to the poetry of rational, honourable, considerate and humane Europe; and not to the childishness, cruelty, and profligacy of Asia. So far as we have yet seen, there is no sound sense, firmness of purpose, or principled goodness, except among the natives of Europe, and their genuine descendants."

Starting with this magnificent assumption, it became a delicate and a difficult task to unite the customs of the East with the "principled goodness" of the West; the "sound sense" of the Briton with the fervor and fanaticism of the Turk. Jeffrey held that Moore had effected this alliance in the most tactful manner, and had thereby "redeemed the character of oriental poetry;" just as Mr. Thomas Haynes Bayly, ten years later, "reclaimed festive song from vulgarity." More carping critics, however, worried their readers a good deal on this point; and the nonconformist conscience cherished uneasy doubts as to Hafed's irregular courtship, and Nourmahal's marriage lines. From across the sea came the accusing voice of young Mr. Channing in the *North American*, proclaiming that "harlotry has found in Moore a bard to smooth her coarseness and veil her effrontery, to give her languor for modesty, and affectation for virtue." The English *Monthly Review*, less open to alarm, confessed with a sigh "a depressing regret

that, with the exception of 'Paradise and the Peri,' no great moral effect is either attained or attempted by *Lalla Rookh*. To what purpose all this sweetness and delicacy of thought and language, all this labour and profusion of Oriental learning? What head is set right in one erroneous notion, what heart is softened in one obdurate feeling by this luxurious quarto?"

It is a lamentable truth that Anacreon exhibits none of Dante's spiritual depth, and that la reine Margot fell short of Queen Victoria's fireside qualities. Nothing could make a moralist of Moore. The light-hearted creature was a model of kindness, of courage, of conjugal fidelity; but — reversing the common rule of life — he preached none of the virtues that he practiced. His pathetic attempts to adjust his tales to the established conventions of society failed signally of their purpose. Even Byron wrote him that little Allegra (as yet unfamiliar with her alphabet) should not be permitted to read *Lalla Rookh*; partly because it was n't proper, and partly — which was prettily said — lest she should discover "that there was a better poet than Papa." It was reserved for Moore's followers to present their verses and stories in the chastened form acceptable to English drawing-rooms, and permitted to English youth. *La Belle Assemblée* published in 1819 an Eastern tale called "*Jahia and Meimoun*," in which the lovers converse like the virtuous characters in *Camilla*. Jahia becomes the guest of an infamous sheik, who intoxicates him with a sherbet composed of "sugar, musk, and amber," and presents him with five thousand sequins and a beautiful Circassian slave. Left alone with this damsel, she addresses him thus: "I feel interested in you, and present circumstances will save me from the charge of immodesty, when I say that I also love you. This love inspires me with fresh horror at the crimes that are here committed."

Jahia protests that he respectfully re-

turns her passion, and that his intentions are of an honorable character; whereupon the circumspect maiden rejoins, "Since such are your sentiments, I will perish with you if I fail in delivering you;" and conducts him, through a tangle of adventures, to safety. Jahia then places Meimouné under the chaperonage of his mother until their wedding day; after which we are happy to know that "they passed their lives in the enjoyment of every comfort attending on domestic felicity. If their lot was not splendid or magnificent, they were rich in mutual affection; and they experienced that fortunate medium which, far removed from indigence, aspires not to the accumulation of immense wealth, and laughs at the unenvied load of pomp and splendor, which it neither seeks, nor desires to obtain."

It is to be hoped that many "obdurate hearts were softened," and many "erroneous notions" were set right by the influence of a story like this. In the *Monthly Museum* an endless narrative poem, "Abdallah," stretched its slow length along from number to number, blooming with fresh moral sentiments on every page; while from an arid wilderness of Moorish love songs, and Persian love songs, and Circassian love songs, and Hindu love songs, I quote this "Arabian" love song, peerless amid its peers.

Thy hair is black as the starless sky,
And clasps thy neck as it loved its home;
Yet it moves at the sound of thy faintest sigh,
Like the snake that lies on the white sea-foam.

I love thee, Ibla. Thou art bright
As the white snow on the hills afar;
Thy face is sweet as the moon by night,—
And thine eye like the clear and rolling star.

But the snow is poor and withers soon,
While thou art firm and rich in hope;
And never (like thine) from the face of the moon
Flamed the dark eye of the antelope.
The truth and accuracy of this last ob-

servation should commend the poem to all lovers of nature.

It is the custom in these days of morbid accuracy to laugh at the second-hand knowledge which Moore so proudly and so innocently displayed. Even Mr. Saintsbury says some unkind things about the notes to *Lalla Rookh*—scraps of twentieth-hand knowledge *he* calls them—while pleasantly recording his affection for the poem itself, an affection based upon the reasonable ground of childish recollections. In the well-ordered home of his infancy, none but "Sunday books" might be read on Sundays in nursery or schoolroom. "But this severity was tempered by one of those easements often occurring in a world, which, if not the best, is certainly not the worst of all possible worlds. For the convenience of servants, or for some other reason, the children were much more in the drawing-room on Sundays than on any other day; and it was an unwritten rule that any book that lived in the drawing-room was fit Sunday-reading. The consequence was that from the time I could read until childish things were put away, I used to spend a considerable part of the first day of the week in reading and re-reading a collection of books, four of which were Scott's *Poems*, *Lalla Rookh*, *The Essays of Elia*, and Southey's *Doctor*. Therefore it may be that I rank *Lalla Rookh* too high."

Blessed memories, and thrice blessed influences of childhood! But if *Lalla Rookh*, like *Vathek*, was written to be the joy of imaginative little boys and girls (alas for those who now replace it with *Allan in Alaska*, and *Little Cora on the Continent!*), the notes to *Lalla Rookh* were, to my infant mind, even more enthralling than the poem. There was a sketchiness about them, a detachment from time and circumstance—I always hated being told the whole of everything—which led me day after day into fresh fields of conjecture. The nymph who was encircled by a rainbow, and bore a radiant son; the scimitars that were so dazzling they

made the warriors wink; the sacred well which reflected the moon at mid-day; and the great embassy that was sent "from some port of the Indies" — a welcome vagueness of geography — to recover a monkey's tooth, snatched away by some equally nameless conqueror; — what child could fail to love such floating stars of erudition?

Our great grandfathers were profoundly impressed by Moore's text-book acquirements. The *Monthly Review* quoted a solid page of the notes to dazzle British readers, who confessed themselves amazed to find a fellow countryman so much "at home" in Persia and Arabia. Blackwood authoritatively announced that Moore was not only familiar "with the grandest regions of the human soul," — which is expected of a poet, — but also with the remotest boundaries of the East; and that in every tone and hue and form he was "purely and intensely Asiatic." "The carping criticism of paltry tastes and limited understandings faded before that burst of admiration with which all enlightened spirits hailed the beauty and magnificence of *Lalla Rookh*."

Few people care to confess to "paltry tastes" and "limited understandings." They would rather join in any general acclamation. "Browning's poetry obscure!" I once heard a lecturer say with scorn. "Let us ask ourselves, 'obscure to whom?' No doubt a great many things are obscure to long-tailed Brazilian apes." After which, his audience, with one accord, admitted that it understood *Sordello*. So when Jeffrey — great umpire of games whose rules he never knew — informed the British public that there was not in *Lalla Rookh* "a simile, a description, a name, a trait of history, or allusion of romance that does not indicate entire familiarity with the life, nature, and learning of the East," the public contentedly took his word for it. When he remarked that "the dazzling splendours, the breathing odours" of Araby were without doubt Moore's "native element," the public, whose native element

was neither splendid nor sweet-smelling, envied the Irishman his softer joys. *Lalla Rookh* might be "voluptuous" (a word we find in every review of the period), but its orientalism was beyond dispute. Did not Mrs. Skinner tell Moore that she had, when in India, translated the prose interludes into Bengali, for the benefit of her moonshee, and that the man was amazed at the accuracy of the costumes? Did not the nephew of the Persian ambassador in Paris tell Mr. Stretch, who told Moore, that *Lalla Rookh* had been translated into Persian; that the songs — particularly "Bendemeer's Stream" — were sung "everywhere;" and that the happy natives could hardly believe the whole work had not been taken originally from a Persian manuscript.

"I'm told, dear Moore, your lays are sung
(Can it be true, you lucky man?)
By moonlight, in the Persian tongue,
Along the streets of Ispahan."

And not of Ispahan only; for in the winter of 1821 the Berlin court presented *Lalla Rookh* with such splendor, such wealth of detail, and such titled actors, that Moore's heart was melted and his head was turned (as any other heart would have been melted, and any other head would have been turned) by the reports thereof. A Grand Duchess of Russia took the part of *Lalla Rookh*; the Duke of Cumberland was Aurungzebe; and a beautiful young sister of Prince Radzivil enchanted all beholders as the Peri. "Nothing else was talked about in Berlin" (it must have been a limited conversation); the King of Prussia had a set of engravings made of the noble actors in their costumes; and the Crown Prince sent word to Moore that he always slept with a copy of *Lalla Rookh* under his pillow, which was foolish, but flattering. Hardly had the echoes of this royal fête died away, when Spontini brought out in Berlin his opera, *The Feast of Roses*, and Moore's triumph in Prussia was complete. Byron, infinitely amused at the success of his own good

advice, wrote to the happy poet, "Your Berlin drama is an honour unknown since the days of Elkanah Settle, whose *Empress of Morocco* was presented by the court ladies, which was, as Johnson remarks, 'the last blast of inflammation to poor Dryden.'"

Who shall say that this comparison is without its dash of malice? There is a natural limit to the success we wish our friends, even when we have spurred them on their way.

If the English court did not lend itself with much gayety or grace to dramatic entertainments, English society was quick to respond to the delights of a modified orientalism. That is to say it sang melting songs about bulbuls and Shiraz wine; wore ravishing Turkish costumes whenever it had a chance (like the beautiful Mrs. Winkworth in the charades at Gaunt House); and covered its locks — if they were feminine locks — with turbans of portentous size and splendor. When Mrs. Fitzherbert, aged seventy-three, gave a fancy dress ball, so many of her guests appeared as Turks, and Georgians, and sultanas, that it was hard to believe that Brighton, and not Stamboul, was the scene of the festivity. At an earlier entertainment, "a rural breakfast and promenade," given by Mrs. Hobart at her villa near Fulham, and "graced by the presence of royalty," the leading attraction was Mrs. Bristow, who represented Queen Nourjahad in the *Garden of Roses*. "Draped in all the magnificence of Eastern grandeur, Mrs. Bristow was seated in the larger drawing-room (which was very beautifully fitted up with cushions in the Indian style), smoking her hookah amidst all sorts of the choicest perfumes. Mrs. Bristow was very profuse with otto of roses, drops of which were thrown about the ladies' dresses. The whole house was scented with the delicious fragrance."

The *European Magazine*, the *Monthly Museum*, all the dim old periodicals published in the early part of the last century, for feminine readers, teem with such

"society notes." From them, too, we learn that by 1823 turbans of "rainbow striped gauze frosted with gold" were in universal demand; while "black velvet turbans, enormously large, and worn very much on one side," must have given a rakish appearance to stout British matrons. *La Belle Assemblée* describes for us with tender enthusiasm a ravishing turban, "in the Turkish style," worn in the winter of 1823 at the theatre, and at evening parties. This masterpiece was of "pink oriental crêpe, beautifully folded in front, and richly ornamented with pearls. The folds are fastened on the left side, just above the ear, with a Turkish scimitar of pearls; and on the right side are tassels of pearls, surmounted by a crescent and a star."

Here we have Lady Jane or Lady Amelia transformed at once into young Nourmahal; and, to aid the illusion, a "Circassian corset" was devised, free from encroaching steel or whalebone, and warranted to give its English wearers the "flowing and luxurious lines" admired in the overfed inmates of the harem. When the passion for orientalism began to subside in London, remote rural districts caught and prolonged the infection. I have sympathized all my life with the innocent ambition of Miss Matty Jenkyns to possess a sea-green turban, like the one worn by Queen Adelaide; and have never been able to forgive that ruthlessly sensible Mary Smith — the chronicler of Cranford — for taking her a "neat middle-aged cap" instead. "I was most particularly anxious to prevent her from disfiguring her small gentle mousy face with a great Saracen's head turban," says the judicious Miss Smith with a smirk of self-commendation; and poor Miss Matty — the cap being bought — had to bow to this arbiter of fate. How much we all suffer in life from the discretion of our families and friends!

Thackeray laughed the dim ghost of *Lalla Rookh* out of England. He mocked at the turbans, and at the old ladies who

wore them; at the vapid love songs, and at the young ladies who sang them.

"I am a little brown bulbul. Come and listen in the moonlight. Praise be to Allah! I am a merry bard."

He derided the "breathing odours of Araby," and the Eastern travelers who imported this exotic atmosphere into Grosvenor Square. Young Bedwin Sands, who has "lived under tents," who has published a quarto, ornamented with his own portrait in various oriental costumes; and who goes about accompanied by a black servant of most unprepossessing appearance, "just like another Brian de Bois Guilbert," is only a degree less ridiculous than Clarence Bulbul who gives Miss Tokely a piece of the sack in which an indiscreet Zuleika was drowned, and whose servant says to callers: "Mon maître est au divan," or "Monsieur trouvera Monsieur dans son sérail. . . . He has coffee and pipes for everybody. I should like you to have seen the face of

old Bowly, his college tutor, called upon to sit cross-legged on a divan, a little cup of bitter black mocha put into his hand, and a large amber-muzzled pipe stuck into his mouth before he could say it was a fine day. Bowly almost thought he had compromised his principles by consenting so far to this Turkish manner." Bulbul's sure and simple method of commending himself to young ladies is by telling them they remind him of a girl he knew in Circassia, — "Ameena, the sister of Schamyle Bey." "Do you know, Miss Pim," he thoughtfully observes, "that you would fetch twenty thousand piastres in the market at Constantinople?" Whereupon Miss Pim is filled with embarrassed elation. An English girl, conscious of being in no great demand at home, was naturally flattered as well as fluttered by the thought of having a market value elsewhere. And perhaps this feminine instinct was at the root of *Lalla Rookh's* long popularity in England.

THE ETHICS OF SPECULATION

BY CHARLES F. DOLE

THE preachers and moralists call this a materialistic age. They deplore the mad rush of multitudes "to get rich" quickly. They call attention to the colossal fortunes which have been piled up by the kings of finance and industry, at the expense of the poor, within a single generation.

Every one agrees that this eager pursuit of wealth is somehow related to speculative methods in business. A considerable class of men are known as speculators. The great stock and produce exchanges in every big city are centres of feverish speculation. The quotations and fluctuations of stock are published in all the newspapers. Farmers in distant country towns, ministers,

often women, watch these quotations, telegraph orders to their brokers, and lie awake nights in alternate hope or fear. Periods of panic sweep like storms over the market, new deals are made, and fortunes are won or lost in a day. Tragedies, suicides, nervous prostration, and insanity follow these speculative fluctuations of value in the staples and the wealth of the world. Every one is interested perforce in this aspect of modern business. The successes and the ruin involved in both great and small speculation appeal to the popular imagination, sometimes with a wholesome alarm, and again more dangerously with a zest to enter into the arena and take its gilded ventures. It is difficult to see how the