

SELECTIONS FROM THE ODES OF
"HAFIZ," THE PERSIAN POET;

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE BY "ERRO,"

From an original translation by his father, with a short preliminary sketch.

IN offering a few original translations from some of the odes of Hafiz, one of the principal poets of Persia, for the first time to the notice of the Canadian reader, we cannot help feeling that we are venturing upon what very many who have never even heard of his name, may consider dry and uninteresting ground. The era in which we live is, moreover, one in which verse has, as it were, outrun poetry—the mechanical has absorbed and overwhelmed the ideal. The great poets who shed such dazzling radiance upon the earlier part of the present century, have, for the most part, gone to their last long home; and they who were wont to listen to their strains, find few, if any, in these degenerate days, who can minister acceptable aliment to souls accustomed to such luscious food.

Not yet has the rugged yet tender spirit of old Scotia found a poet to stand before her upon whom she can gaze complacently, when in thought she turns to weep over the cold inanimate clay of Burns and Scott. And Erin, her twin-sister in sorrow, even yet veils her tearful eyes, bending over the broken lyre of Moore. For—

"The harp that once through Tara's halls
The soul of music shed,
Now hangs as mute on Tara's walls
As if that soul were fled."

In England, from whose bosom arose, almost at the same period, the genius of a Shelley, a Wordsworth, a Byron, a Coleridge, and a Southey,—how, in the luminous rays still shed upwards by that bright though departed constellation, shall the light of any newly-risen star, unless of the first magnitude, hope to render itself visible?

Not that I believe, as many are fond of proclaiming, that for the present poetry lies dead. Any one who looks much at the monthly literature of the day, will occasionally meet, amongst much that is heavy and lifeless as a December fog, indications, few and rare though they be, which, like the lightning's fitfully flashing athwart the darkened heavens, tell that the spirit there brooding may indeed slumber, but is not yet extinct. There is no want of talent which might be nurtured into genius; but the world is yet mourning over the still warm graves of her departed loved ones, and, like Rachel weeping for her children, refuses to be comforted, because they are not.

Nor is this the only disadvantage under which a writer of the present day labours. If poetry be, indeed, as some suppose, on the decline, surely there is no lack of verse. The press teems with it, and—

"Printer's devils shake their weary bones,"

But to what end? We have poems, (so called) of every size and sort, upon every subject, known and unknown. The social soil would even appear to be too rank for the crop, which rushing to maturity before its due time, presents truly to the grasp of the reaper abundance of straw, but containeth only here and there a stray sickly ear of grain, which, when winnowed and sifted from the rubbish with which it is encumbered, will rarely repay the toil necessary for obtaining it.

Another difficulty presents itself in the spirit and tendency of the age in which we live. This, as a clever living writer truly remarks, is essentially a mechanical age:—"Poetry, the workings of genius itself, which in all times, with one or another meaning, has been called inspiration, and held to be mysterious and inscrutable, is no longer without its scientific exposition. The building of the lofty rhyme is like any other masonry or bricklaying. We have theories of its rise, height, decline and fall; which latter, it would seem, is now near among all people." "Of natural talent there is no deficiency; one or two richly endowed individuals even give us a superiority in this respect. But what is the song they sing? Is it a tone of the Memnon statue breathing music as the *light* first touches it?—A 'liquid wisdom,' disclosing to our sense the deep, infinite harmonies of nature and man's soul? Alas! no. It is not a matin or vesper hymn to the spirit of all beauty,—but a fierce clashing of cymbals and shouting of multitudes, as children pass through the fire to Moloch! Poetry, itself, has no eye for the invisible. Beauty is no longer the god it worships, but some brute image of strength, which we may well call an idol,—for true strength is one and the same with beauty,—and its worship also is a hymn. The meek, silent light, can mould, create and purify all nature; but the loud whirlwind, the sign and product of disunion, of weakness, passes on and is forgotten."

The great, and indeed almost the only question now asked by the world is—will it Pay?—What is the amount of tangible, computable profit to be derived from it? The world no longer is a world worshipping in faith. Whatever cannot be handled, measured and demonstrated, is no longer believed or followed; and the worshippers of the ideal and inspired, a few poor, homeless, homeless, and despised wanderers, must either brood sorrowfully and silently over the ruins of departed glory, or preach in low wailings to insensate ears, truths which are only regarded as the ravings of insanity, or the mutterings of delirium or idiocy. The age of Poetry, of faith, has indeed, for a time, departed, but not, assuredly, for ever. Though her prophets, for a while, may be driven by the din of the laborers working at the new Babel, to the caves and wildernesses, yet shall the latent spark