

George Gordon Byron (1788-1824)

6 *A Very Mournful Ballad on the Siege and Conquest of
Alhama,*

Which, in the Arabic language, is to the following purport.

The Moorish King rides up and down
Through Granada's royal town;
From Elvira's gates to those
Of Bivarambla on he goes.

Woe is me, Alhama! 5

Letters to the monarch tell
How Alhama's city fell:
In the fire the scroll he threw,
And the messenger he slew.

Woe is me, Alhama! 10

He quits his mule, and mounts his horse,
And through the street directs his course;
Through the street of Zacatin
To the Alhambra spurring in.

Woe is me, Alhama! 15

When the Alhambra walls he gain'd,
On the moment he ordain'd
That the trumpet straight should sound
With the silver clarion round.

Woe is me, Alhama! 20

And when the hollow drums of war
Beat the loud alarm afar,

That the Moors of town and plain
Might answer to the martial strain,
 Woe is me, Alhama! 25

Then the Moors, by this aware
That bloody Mars recall'd them there,
One by one, and two by two,
To a mighty squadron grew.
 Woe is me, Alhama! 30

Out then spake an aged Moor
In these words the king before,
“Wherefore call on us, oh King?
What may mean this gathering?”
 Woe is me, Alhama! 35

“Friends! ye have, alas! to know
Of a most disastrous blow,
That the Christians, stern and bold,
Have obtain'd Alhama's hold.”
 Woe is me, Alhama! 40

Out then spake old Alfaqui,
With his beard so white to see,
“Good King! thou art justly served,
Good King! this thou hast deserved.
 Woe is me, Alhama! 45

“By thee were slain, in evil hour,
The Abencerrage, Granada's flower;
And strangers were received by thee
Of Cordova the Chivalry.
 Woe is me, Alhama! 50

“And for this, oh King! is sent
On thee a double chastisement:
Thee and thine, thy crown and realm,
One last wreck shall overwhelm.

Woe is me, Alhama! 55

“He who holds no laws in awe,
He must perish by the law;
And Granada must be won,
And thyself with her undone.”

Woe is me, Alhama! 60

Fire flash'd from out the old Moor's eyes.
The Monarch's wrath began to rise,
Because he answer'd, and because
He spake exceeding well of laws.

Woe is me, Alhama! 65

“There is no law to say such things
As may disgust the ear of kings:” —
Thus, snorting with his choler, said
The Moorish King, and doom'd him dead.

Woe is me, Alhama! 70

Moor Alfaqui! Moor Alfaqui!
Though thy beard so hoary be,
The King hath sent to have thee seized,
For Alhama's loss displeas'd.

Woe is me, Alhama! 75

And to fix thy head upon
High Alhambra's loftiest stone;

That this for thee should be the law,
And others tremble when they saw.
Woe is me, Alhama! 80

“Cavalier, and man of worth!
Let these words of mine go forth;
Let the Moorish Monarch know,
That to him I nothing owe.
Woe is me, Alhama! 85

“But on my soul Alhama weighs,
And on my inmost spirit preys;
And if the King his land hath lost,
Yet others may have lost the most.
Woe is me, Alhama! 90

“Sires have lost their children, wives
Their lords, and valiant men their lives;
One what best his love might claim
Hath lost, another wealth, or fame.
Woe is me, Alhama! 95

“I lost a damsel in that hour,
Of all the land the loveliest flower;
Doubloons a hundred I would pay,
And think her ransom cheap that day.”
Woe is me, Alhama! 100

And as these things the old Moor said,
They sever'd from the trunk his head;
And to the Alhambra's wall with speed
’T was carried, as the King decreed.
Woe is me, Alhama! 105

And men and infants therein weep
Their loss, so heavy and so deep:
Granada's ladies, all she rears
Within her walls, burst into tears.

Woe is me, Alhama! 110

And from the windows o'er the walls
The sable web of mourning falls;
The King weeps as a woman o'er
His loss, for it is much and sore.

Woe is me, Alhama! 115

1817

(From *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*. Complete in One
Volume. Collected and Arranged, with Illustrative Notes by
Thomas Moore, et al. London, 1846)