

Canadian Literature.—III.

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Thomas d'Arcy McGee.

We find on the roll of Canadian poets more than one man whose time and strength were mainly given to his country in active political life, yet who, like Longfellow's "humbler poet,"

Through long days of labour
And nights devoid of ease,
Still heard in his soul the music
Of wonderful melodies.

The names of Joseph Howe and D'Arcy McGee will at once occur to us, and the great statesman of Nova Scotia and his literary work have been already dealt with in this magazine.*

The Hon. Thomas d'Arcy McGee was born in 1825 at Carlingford, County Louth, Ireland, but when he was eight years old his family removed to Wexford. His mother, who seems to have been a woman of deep piety, strong affections and fine tastes, died while he was still a child; but it was to her influence that the future poet traced the beginnings of his religious faith, no less than his love for poetry and his devotion to Ireland. The boy was educated at a day school in Wexford, and showed very early that love of history and legend, especially that of his own country, which appears in his verses. Of his boyish ambitions, he writes later in life:

I dreamed a dream when the woods were green,
And my April heart made an April scene,
In the far, far distant land,
That even I might something do
That would keep my memory for the true,
And my name from the spoiler's hand.

At seventeen, McGee, with one sister, came to America. It was at the time when the Irish, in America as well as at home, were agitating for the repeal of the union, and McGee, boy though he was, at once became prominent as an orator, lecturer and journalist. Recalled to Ireland three years later, he took an active part in the agitation there, in connection with the *Nation*, the organ of the "Young Ireland" party. Finally, on the failure of the rebellion of 1848, he was forced to escape to America, and, in the *New York Nation*, he denounced the clergy of his church for causing the collapse of the revolutionary movement. Archbishop Hughes, of New York, defended the clergy, and McGee lost the sympathies of many of the Irish people. When the bitterness of failure had, to some extent, been forgotten, he recognized and regretted his mistake in this controversy, and often expressed his sorrow

* See EDUCATIONAL REVIEW for October, 1903.

for the rashness and ignorance that had led him into it. In succeeding years the young Irishman's opinions underwent a change, and he tried to point out to the Irish people that their true interests lay, not in fruitless struggles and rebellion, but in abiding by law, in peaceful industry, self-improvement and self-control, and, above all, that their work as useful citizens must be ruled by religious principles. "This," he says, "I discovered in a way which, I trust in God, you will never have to travel—by controversy and bitterness, and sorrow for lost time and wasted opportunities." He expresses these convictions in his poetry, especially in the following verses:

FREEDOM'S LAND.

I.

Where is Freedom's glorious land?
Is it where a lawless race
Scorns all just control, and stand
Each one 'gainst his brother's face?
No! for man's wild passions still
Heavier chains their tyrants forge,
And his own unbridled will
Is itself the fiercest scourge,
And a land of anarchy
Never can be truly free.

II.

When her fetters Gallia broke
And indignant cast away,
With the old and galling yoke,
Every salutary sway;
Were not the destroyers then
Tyrants worse to meaner slaves?
Freedom is miscalled of men
When her footsteps tread on graves—
Is no land of liberty
Where unpunished crime goes free.

III.

But where men like brethren stand,
Each one his own spirit rules,
Serving best his own dear land,
Turning from the anarch's schools,
Reverencing all lawful sway—
Patient if it be unjust;
If the fabric should decay,
Build, improve,—not raze to dust;
Liberty and justice fair
Find their holiest altars there.

IV.

Such be thou, oh land of mine!
Stilled be every discord rude!
Erin, let thy sons combine
In one holy brotherhood!
Prudent, temperate, firm and strong—
Loyalty our watchword be!
Truth our shield 'gainst taunt and wrong,
And warm hearts our chivalry!
Loyal soul and stainless hand,
Make our country Freedom's land!