

Everybody familiar with Byron knows how deeply he loved Newstead. When he found himself in his childhood transferred from cheap lodgings in Aberdeen to this ancestral home, he described himself as living in a palace. In some respects the description is true. To-day it looks splendid; hoary with age and memories; an epitome in some respects of the history of England. As its name implies, it was once an Abbey, and was one of the monastic institutions which Henry VII. diverted from the church to his nobles; the foundation of most of the fortunes of the aristocracy of England, including the Cavendishes, the Fitzmaurices, of whom Lord Lansdowne is the head, and the Russells, with the Duke of Bedford as the present leader of that illustrious line. There is scarcely a part of the building, even with modern improvements, that does not look like a monastery. Everywhere you pass through cloister, some of them reminiscent of the cloisters in the House of Commons, now used as a cloak room, but relics of the days when an Abbey began to make Westminster one of the noble spots in the growing village of London. It was a cold day, and a walk through these long and bare cloisters made one shiver; as a matter of fact, there are hot water pipes all over the place, but the restless spirit of the great business man who is now the possessor has resolved on radical improvements, and for the moment the hot water pipes were up, and the cold was left to work its will through the bleak cloisters.

Around there are remnants of the chapel and the other monastic buildings; they are more or less in ruin, and this adds to the air of ancient and brooding history which is characteristic of the whole place. It is extremely irregular; there are big and almost palatial rooms, and then there are tiny rooms where you could scarcely swing a cat. The stairs in some places are steep and narrow. The room in which Ben himself used to live is at the top of the house; right as well indeed be called an attic; but it has a beautiful view out on the grounds and the remnants of the old abbey. You have to approach it by one of those winding little staircases; nowadays it would be objected to by a domestic servant of a lordly footman, as too remote and too troublesome to reach.

Each of the big bedrooms has a history. The Royal family preserved the right to use these bedrooms when it suited them and when they found themselves in that part of the country. One room is called the King Edward I. room, and another the room of Charles II.; a third is called the Duke of Sussex room. Poor Byron did not make much use of these spacious and palatial chambers; he was too poor when he was transferred to Newstead and had to content with a few of the smaller rooms, including that attic in which he lived and dreamed; and started the poem that in a day made him famous and immortal instead of poor and neglected.

There are a few Byron relics in the Abbey, a sword and some other relics of the ancestors—those strange and eccentric soldiers and sailors who gave to Byron the hot blood and the abnormal nerves that at once made him a poet and an outcast. Curiously enough, there are more reminiscences of David Livingstone, the great explorer whom Henry M. Stanley found in Africa. The explanation is that Newstead Abbey was for many years the home of a Colonel Webb. Webb was a globe-trotting Englishman; one of his friends was the great African missionary, and Livingstone was his honoured guest for some time, wrote some of his work there, and a medalion of the strong typically Scotch face is on the wall. The great dining-room—quite a royal chamber—was too cold for lunch; so we took our meal in small comfortable rooms on its side. One of the curiosities of the place is a tablet in one of the cloisters where are set forth the names of the Augustinian friars who formerly were the owners of the Abbey, put up by I know not whom—probably some devotee of the ancient faith.

I was even more anxious to see Byron's tomb. Every Byron scholar will remember that long and dreary procession of Byron's remains from the Misolombi to his home: with the refusal of the authorities of Westminster Abbey to allow the remains of one of England's greatest figures to lie in the goodly company of the poets and the writers. That tragic procession took nearly two months before it reached its goal—on May 26 to July 16. Hucklell Torkard in the slight and short glimpse I got of it seemed just an ordinary English working class village. One of the incidents, it will be remembered, was that Lady Melbourne, the Lady Caroline Lamb of an earlier date—wife of a man who was Prime Minister of England and Queen Victoria's first Premier, tutor and friend—accidentally met the funeral procession outside London. She had been one of Byron's fiercest passionate and most tempestuous lovers; and their passion had ended in a fierce quarrel, with the most venomous and unstrained and vituperative letter Byron ever wrote; it is preserved in his published letters. The coffin of the dead lover brought back all the complicated past, and she never recovered; died soon after; the always unbalanced mind had received its final shock.

The church at Hucklell Torkard is a fair size, and has been beautified

a good deal by one of its restors. The tomb of Byron is a disappointment. There is nothing to show that one so illustrious lies below, except a short slab with the name Byron upon it. The remains lie in a sealed vault below, to which there is no access, except by opening up a big stone, which has never been done since the remains of his mother and his daughter were placed in the row of the unhappy Byrons of former generations, by the side of whom the greatest of the name sleeps.

There are other memorials, however, of Byron—a medallion placed there by Augusta Leigh, the half sister whose name his is inextricably associated whether in guilt or in pure affection the world hasn't yet decided. Apart from this and a little away from it, there is another memorial of Byron which struck me as an outrage. I remember seeing in the House of Commons in the far back eighties and afterwards walking through Pall Mall an eccentric and very rich Scotch baronet named Sir Tollemache Sinclair—with the red beard of the Highlander and the rather mystic look. He was an eccentric, always apparently in a passion about something and unable to restrain the desire for communicating these outbreaks of rage in spluttering letters to the papers. He took it into his head that he also would commemorate Byron; so he put up a tablet in which there are a number of quotations from Victor Hugo, Chateaubriand, even Disraeli, bearing testimony to the genius of Byron; as if Byron required testimonials. A companion wittily described this tablet as a series of press cuttings.

One more little incident. There is in the graveyard outside the tomb of Ben Caunt, Ben Caunt was a famous prize fighter. "They say," said the old sexton with a smile, "that as many people come to see the tomb of Ben Caunt as of Byron; but," he added, "it isn't true." I hope not.

## IN THE WAKE OF THE POETS

By Rev. D. A. CASEY

Christmas is the one day in all the year when the busy world forgets its cares and finds time to worship the ideal. Before the stable of Bethlehem it is difficult to think of stock and sheaves, and so for once the world keeps holiday. But if the Christmas spirit holds all of us captive, there is one to whom it makes special appeal, and that is the poet. For every poet is an idealist. He hears voices, and sees visions, and dreams dreams that ordinary mortals are not conscious of. He is a visitor from some other planet that has somehow strayed into this world of ours. The exile's bitter pain is ever eating at his heart, and, whether he wills it or not, he cannot but voice his longing for that dear land of music and song from whence he has wandered. Small wonder, then, that he should make Christmas peculiarly his own. It is the one time when he feels most at home with his neighbors, for on that day they, too, hear voices that are forever ringing in his ears, and dreams that are his daily companions.

It would be a delightful task to "go over to Bethlehem" in the wake of all the Catholic poets who have ever knelt before the lowly manger; for as it is only Catholics who can fully comprehend the spirit and meaning of Christmas, so it is only the Catholic poet who can re-echo in his lines the song the shepherds heard that night of nights above storied Bethlehem. But time and space prohibit us from so doing, and so we must be content with something very much more modest, namely, a cursory glance at the Christmas songs of our own Catholic Canadian writers. In the first place there is Dr. O'Hagan. We cannot claim a very full acquaintance with his work, but upon our desk there lies at this moment a delightful little volume of verse, "In the Heart of the Meadow." From it we quote this beautiful Christmas poem:

"THE BARE OF BETHLEHEM"

The Christ Child in the manger lay

The inn were full that night:  
And o'er Judea's distant plains  
There streamed a wondrous light;  
The shepherd 'mid his white-fleeced flock  
Gazed wistfully from afar,  
And voices strange, angelic, sweet,  
Smote heart and hill and star.

The Christ-Child in the manger lay—  
A Royal Throne of Grace;  
And Mary, Lily Maid of God,  
Found glory in His face;  
For a King was born in Bethlehem—  
In Bethlehem of Judea,  
Whose scepter'd power of love and grace  
Should reach from sea to sea.

Next we turn to Father Dollard. It would be hard to say anything in praise of his verse that has not already been beautifully said by abler critics. He is easily the first of our singers, with a fame that extends far beyond the confines of this continent. Years ago, when Canada was but a name to us, the ballads and lyrics of "Sieve na mon" were more familiar than the work of the poets who lived and wrote in our own loved Ireland. His is the generosity that is characteristic of true greatness. If we have achieved anything worthy of even passing notice it is in great measure due to the kindly encouragement of this master of the poetic art. More we will not say for we would spare the good Father's blushes. In

his volume of published poems we find many beautiful Christmas songs, such as "Christmas Morn in Ireland," "Bethlehem Town," "Christmas Hymn," "Christ is born in Bethlehem," and "The Early Christmas Mass." We quote the last mentioned:

Slipping down the Curlew mountain

When the shadow's on the heather

And the rime is on the grass—

Wait may chill our highland cottage;

But the Saviour makes us happy on

His holy Christmas Day.

I must wake my dear ones early on

This morn of peace and joy,

Little pet lamb, pretty Nora, sturdy

Neil, my comely boy,

When the hearth is cleaned and cosy

And the dancing flames are gay,

And the kettle croons a welcome to

the coming Christmas Day.

Darkness lingers on the valley and

the fairy-haunted glen,

Eastward now the break of morning

brings the peace of God to men.

Near the mountain-rim—first jewel of

the Christ Child's diadem,

Burns a star of radiant beauty like

the Star of Bethlehem.

Wake ye now, my sleeping treasures,

wake ye now, your mother's

joy,

Pretty Nora, drowsy lambkin, blue-

eyed Neil, my laughing boy—

For the shadow's on the heather and

the time is on the grass,

And the angels hurry earthward to

the early Christmas Mass.

See above you ivied abbey, where

God's servants prayed of old

Fiery pillars in the heavens—bars of

silver, shafts of gold—

Swing the gates of glory open, shin-

ing souls unnumbered pass,

Let us hurry down to meet them at

the early Christmas Mass.

Down the mountain, up the valley,

from the riverside and glen,

Throng the cheery chatting people,

stately women, stalwart men;

Guard, oh, guard them, God of Erin?

bitter sorrow theirs, alas?

Many a heart shall bleed in exile ere

another Christmas Mass.

Lift thy drooping face, my Erin, God

has heard thy bitter moan,

Thou' His hand rest heavy on thee,

'tis to make thee more His

own.

Faith has died where nations flour-

ished—earthly gain His gifts

surpass,

When He greets His gathered people

at the early Christmas Mass.

We have, more than once, in these

pages, referred to Dr. William Joseph

Fischer's splendid contribution to

Canadian Catholic verse. "The

Toller and Other Poems" is a book

worth while that should be on the

shelves of all who like the cultivated

and refined. Although it has reached

a second edition we are afraid that

many Catholics have yet to make its

acquaintance. We have not so many

writers of our own that we cannot

afford to buy their books, but apart

altogether from the bond of the

Faith, the poems of Dr. O'Hagan, Dr.

Fischer and Father Dollard deserve

the patronage of the public because

of their intrinsic worth. From Dr.

Fischer's volume we abstract:

A CHRISTMAS IDYL

The starlight bright steals into my

dark room

Ab! would that it might still this

heart, so cold—

This heart, that knows and feels the

biting cold

Of loneliness? Would that its bitter

gloom

Might sunshine forth the fairest bud

or bloom

Of hope, that I might see his precious

mould

Before mine eyes grow dim? The

years have rolled

Too slowly on, since that black night

of doom.

A laughing child, I held him to my

breat

And saw him flower there before mine

eyes.

But O! too brief was this bright Pa-

ra-dise?

With all a mother's love, his hands I

pressed,

The night he left my heart, my house

forlorn,

The flower sweet gave way—I felt the

thorn.

II

And, in my old chair, here I sit alone,

This happy night of nights, to all

most dear,

And now the next rings forth

Christmas cheer

From out the belly of yon church of

stone,

For me no gladness music will

stone—

My heart still threnodies its tones of

fear.

My poor, poor child? Alas o'er snowy

mere,

The wind, like some sad mother,

maketh moan.

Mary, most kind, who on this peace-

ful night

Watched by a crib of straw an only

Child,

Take my poor boy to thy heart, un-

defiled?

He needs thee now. Let the winged

angels, bright,

Unbar the prison door—that he may

see

The lights of Christmas burning fresh

and free?

It is only those to whom Christmas

brings sad sweet thoughts of those who

have passed forever from the earthly

scene that can enter into the spirit

of Dr. Fischer's touching lines. It is

only those of us who know that

never again, save in the dreams that

memories awake, shall we hear the

loving greeting from lips now stilled

in death, that can realize the full

pathos of the heart-cry that he would

make articulate.

From my own little volume of

verse, "At the Gate of the Temple," I

select this.

IRISH CHRISTMAS LEGEND

Pile high the turf upon the fire,

And make the cabin bright,

And put no bolt upon the door

This blessed Christmas night;

For if so be they pass this way,

And she in trouble sore,

They'll know an Irish welcome waits

Beyond the open door.

Now place the Christmas candles

there

Put one for every pane

That they may see the blessed light

A shining through the rain;

The curlew calls across the sky,

The winds are keening low,

Who knows but here they'll rest

awhile,

As on the way they go.

One Christmas Eve, long, long ago,

The doors were bolted fast,

And in the dawn's grey light they

found

Their footstep as they passed;

For this the Christmas lights are set,

The doors are open wide,

That in her travail she may know

A place she may abide.

The inns were full, but there is room,

This blessed Christmas night,

For Mary and her Holy Child,

Where shines the Christmas light.

Then set a candle in each pane,

That passing, they may know

A welcome waits the Holy Child

Where Christmas lights bright glow.

Miss Rose Ferguson of Toronto has

given us in "Maple Leaves and

Snowflakes" a very promising little

volume of verse. But I looked in

vain for a poem about Christmas.

If there are other Catholic singers in

Canada, they have either so far not

dared to brave the critics, or they

have succeeded admirably in keeping

the names of their publishers secret.

This latter is a fault that must be

laid at the feet of most of our Catho-

lic writers. They are too prone to

hide their light under a bushel. If

they would but court a little more

publicity their work would be more

appreciated because better known.

The quotations I have made from the

authors mentioned above prove, I

think, that we have poetry of our very

own who can sing sweetly and well.

It is hardly necessary to remind the

reader that the above poems are by

no means the best examples of the

poets' work. They have been selected

simply because they treated of

Christmas themes.

THE CHURCH OF

CHRIST

(By Orestes A. Brownson, formerly a Protestant)