

CAN A LORD BE A POET?

By Very Reverend Æneas McDonell Dawson, V.G., LL.D., Etc.



HE Edinburgh reviewers who criticised Lord Byron must have profited amazingly by *cultivating learning on a little oatmeal*, when they made the astounding discovery that a

Lord cannot write Poetry.

Let us see what history says to such a pretended discovery, and first let us consult sacred history. David and Solomon were mighty lords in their day, and yet they were poets; their poems counting by the thousand.

Moses was a Lord, and a great one too, the lord and leader of the Israelite people. Notwithstanding this high dignity he was a poet,—the author of those magnificent hymns:—*Audite cœli quæ loquor, Cantemus Domino, Glorioso enim magnificatus est.*

Secular history is nearer us and may be appealed to more at large. The great Celtic bard was a powerful lord as well as warrior among his people, although he owned not the modern designation of earl, marquess, duke, and all that. Nevertheless, he was eminent as a poet. So much so that his poems have stood the ordeal of time and are a living voice in our day, celebrating the events of a bygone age, preserved in the memories and written in the books of the Gaelic people of Western Scotland. They are known only to English readers by the translation of Mr. Macpherson.

It has been maintained that this gentleman was the author of them. But such a position can never be proved. Mr. Macpherson, although he could translate, could not compose such poems. He was utterly incapable. He tried to convince the world that he was a poet by writing some poems. But they found no acceptance with the British public, whilst the

poems of Ossian were enthusiastically received and still hold their place in English literature. The writer has heard portions of them recited by cultivated Highlanders in the original language; and it is well known that there were books containing collections of the renowned Celtic bard's poems. One book, in particular, may be mentioned. It was in the possession of Mr. McDonell of Knogydart, and was known in the family as the "*Red Book.*" It was lent to Mr. Macpherson and never returned.

"The poems of Ossian are highly deserving of attention if it were only that they show the state of society among the Caledonians in the days of the Gaelic bard. The Druids had introduced a civilization superior to that of Imperial Rome inasmuch as its worship acknowledged the one only God, whilst Rome rioted in its absurd polytheism, and practised cruelties unheard of among the primitive Caledonians. Druidism, although it rigidly enforced its social organization, was, nevertheless, a milder system than any other form of heathenism and when Christianity was presented in the second century, it gave up its superstition more easily than any other pagan system. Polytheism, with all its horrors, still reigned at Rome and all sorts of cruelty prevailed, whilst the Christians of North Britain (Caledonia), having become numerous and powerful, kindly received and protected their brethren of the South who were so savagely persecuted by the Emperor Dioclesian.

The success of the Caledonians in repelling the warlike legions of Imperial Rome, gave proof, not only of bravery and patriotism, but also of military organization and skill in the art of war. Without all this, how could they have driven back to the South in a shattered condition, the great army of 80,000 Roman warriors