

## An Unforgotten Poet

**T**HOMAS D'ARCY McGEE'S tragic death has lent especial interest to his political career, and has, perhaps, slightly obscured his literary reputation. He is remembered as the ill-starred statesman rather than the poet, but there are some lines which he has written that will not be forgotten in his adopted country. He was born in Carlingford, County Louth, Ireland, in 1825, and was nurtured amid the wild and romantic scenery of Ross-trevor, which must have impressed itself deeply upon a nature dowered with that Celtic dreaminess which proves both a solace and a snare. Soon after the removal of the family to Wexford the mother died, and was buried in the old Cistercian Abbey. But to the gifted son, D'Arcy, remained the memory of her wealth of legendary lore, her love for the Gaelic melodies, and her fervent religious devotion.

In June, 1842, the young Irish lad reached Boston, and on the following Fourth of July the seventeen-year-old orator delivered an address which out-cried the American Eagle. He was offered a position on the Boston "Pilot," and during the next three years the boy editor played an eloquent part in defending his distressed countrymen, who were at that time suffering persecution in the alleged Land of the Free.

Then he returned to Ireland as editor of the "Dublin Freeman's Journal," to succeed to the editorship of the "Nation." In those days he was a hot revolutionist, and was obliged to leave Ireland after one of those useless outbreaks with which Irish history is overflowing. During his second editorial experience in America his political views underwent a change, and he saw the futility and unreason of rebellion. But the "American Celt" was not appreciated as a journalistic enterprise, and D'Arcy McGee finally came to Montreal to publish "The New Era." He was returned to the Canadian Parliament as one of the three members for Montreal, and, in spite of all prejudices, won his way among members of all creeds and races because of his personal charm and brilliant ability. Honours came swiftly to him, and in 1867 he was sent to Paris as one of the Commissioners from Canada to the great Exposition. He became Minister of Agriculture and Emigration, and after Confederation might have joined the Cabinet, had it not been for his unselfish wish to make way for a Nova Scotian friend. On the 6th of November, 1867, he took his seat as member for Montreal West. On the 6th of the following April he delivered an eloquent speech before the Commons, urging the cementing of the lately-formed Confederation by bonds of mutual kindness and good-will, but ere he reached his home he was struck down by the bullet of an assassin. One of his Fenian enemies, acting after the mean cowardice of their kind, had committed the crime, for which he afterwards suffered the penalty. Orator, historian and essayist, few of his countrymen have brought such brilliant gifts to the service of the state, and few have been mourned more deeply and sincerely.

Among his more fanciful poems none attracted more favourable notice than "To My Wishing-cap":

Wishing-cap, Wishing-cap, I would be  
Far away, far away o'er the sea,  
Where the red birch roots  
Down the ribbed rock shoots,

In Donegal the brave,  
And white-sailed skiffs  
Speckle the cliffs,  
And the gannet drinks the wave.

Wishing-cap, Wishing-cap, I would lie  
On a Wicklow hill, and stare the sky,  
Or count the human atoms that pass  
The threadlike road through Glenmacnass,  
Where once the clans of O'Byrne were;  
Or talk to the breeze  
Under sycamore trees,  
In Glenart's forests fair.

Wishing-cap, Wishing-cap, let us away  
To walk in the cloisters, at close of day,  
Once trod by friars of orders gray  
In Norman Selskar's renown'd abbaye,  
And Carmen's ancient town;

For I would kneel at my mother's grave,  
Where the plummy churchyard elms e'er  
Wave,  
And the old war-walls look down.

The poem "Jacques Cartier" is learned by most Canadians in childhood, and long may it remain in the nation's anthology!

In the seaport of Saint Malo, 'twas a smiling morn in May,  
When the Commodore Jacques Cartier to the westward sailed away;  
In the crowded old cathedral all the town were on their knees,  
For the safe return of kinsmen from the undiscover'd seas;  
And every autumn blast that swept o'er pinnacle and pier  
Fill'd manly hearts with sorrow and gentle hearts with fear.

A year pass'd o'er Saint Malo—again came round the day  
When the Commodore Jacques Cartier to the westward sail'd away;  
But no tidings from the absent had come the way they went,  
And tearful were the vigils that many a maiden spent;  
And manly hearts were fill'd with gloom, and gentle hearts with fear,  
When no tidings came from Cartier at the closing of the year.

But the Earth is as the Future, it hath its hidden side,  
And the Captain of Saint Malo was rejoicing, in his pride,  
In the forests of the North—while his townsmen mourn'd his loss  
He was rearing on Mount Royal the fleur-de-lis and cross;  
And when two months were over and added to the year,  
Saint Malo hail'd him home again, cheer answering to cheer.

He told them of a region, hard, iron-bound and cold,  
Nor seas of pearl abounded, nor mines of shining gold,  
Where the wind from Thule freezes the word upon the lip,  
And the ice in spring comes sailing athwart the early ship;  
He told them of the frozen scene until they thrill'd with fear,  
And piled fresh fuel on the hearth to make him better cheer.

But when he changed the strain—he told how soon is cast  
In early spring the fetters that hold the waters fast;  
How the winter causeway, broken, is drifted out to sea,  
And the rills and rivers sing with pride the anthem of the free;  
How the magic wand of summer clad the landscape, to his eyes,  
Like the dry bones of the just, when they wake in Paradise.

He told them of the Algonquin braves—the hunters of the wild,  
Of how the Indian mother in the forest rocks her child;  
Of how, poor souls! they fancy, in every living thing,  
A spirit good or evil, that claims their worshipping;  
Of how they brought their sick and maim'd for him to breathe upon,  
And of the wonders wrought for them through the Gospel of St John.

He told them of the river whose mighty current gave  
Its freshness, for a hundred leagues, to Ocean's briny wave;  
He told them of the glorious scene presented to his sight,  
What time he rear'd the cross and crown on Hochelaga's height,  
And of the fortress cliff that keeps of Canada the key,  
And they welcomed back Jacques Cartier from his perils over sea.

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