

Old Publications

(By a Regular Contributor.)

I am still with Ossian and in the misty past. Before laying down the volume I must extract from it a confession of the translator Macpherson. It will be remembered that I pointed out, in recent issues, that Macpherson had taken almost every means, short of a plain assertion, to leave the impression that he had been the real author of the poems ascribed to Ossian, and that the latter was a mere myth. Here and there under passages in Ossian's poems the translator has entered notes, or explanatory comments, generally at the foot of the page with the usual asterisks. I will quote the first verse of the great poem "Cath-Loda," and then give the note that Macpherson subjoins—mark them both well.

Ossian sings: "Whence is the stream of years? Whither do they roll along? Where have they hid, in mist, their many colored sides? I look into the times of old, but they seem dim to Ossian's eyes, like reflected moon-beams on a distant lake. Here rise the red beams of war. There, silent, dwells a feeble race. They mark no years with their deeds as slow they pass along. Dweller between the shields; thou that awakest the falling soul, descend from thy wall, harp of Cora, with thy voices three. Come with that which kindles the past; rear the forms of old on their own dark-brown years. Uthorno, hill of storms, I behold my race on thy sides. Fingal is bending in night, over Duthmaru's tomb."

Here comes in Macpherson's queer note, it runs thus:

"The bards, who were always ready to supply what they thought deficient in the poems of Ossian, have inserted a great many incidents between the second and third Duan (canto) of Cath-Loda. Their interpolations are so easily distinguished from the genuine remains of Ossian, that it took me very little time to mark them out, and totally reject them. If the modern Scots and Irish bards have shewn any judgment, it is in ascribing their own compositions to names of antiquity, for, by that means, they themselves have escaped that contempt which the authors of such futile performances must necessarily have met with, from people of true taste. I was led into this observation, by an Irish poem, just now before me. It concerns a descent made by Swaran, King of Lochlin, on Ireland, and is the work, says the traditional preface to it, of Ossian MacFion. It, however, appears from several pious ejaculations, that it was rather the composition of some good priest, in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, for he speaks with great devotion of a pilgrimage, and more particularly of the blue-eyed daughters of the convent. Religious, however, as the poet was, he was not altogether moral in the scenes he introduces between Swaran and the wife of Conguillon, both of whom he represents as giants."

No more need I quote for the present. By this note, however founded in truth, or authentic, the criticism it contains may be, it is clear that Macpherson acknowledges the reality of Ossian. For the statement that the ancient poet had modern imitators, who sought to escape the condemnation their mediocrity deserved, by ascribing their faulty compositions to him, is sufficiently acknowledgment of the genuineness of Ossian, the reality of his personality, and the great antiquity of his work. Thus does Macpherson, in a moment of honest literary criticism, clearly upset all the impressions he otherwise has sought to create as to the non-existence of Ossian, and as to his own originality in the poems that he had translated.

At the time when Macpherson published his productions it was quite possible to make the general reading public believe that there were no older, or pre-Christian Irish or Celtic works of importance. But today, in presence of all the discoveries in the rich mines of Celtic letters, that have been made, and in the presence of the volumes—manuscript and illuminated—that are deposited in the Library of Trinity College, in the British Museum, and in other great collections (all open to the student of to-day) it would be absolutely impossible for any man to make the world agree with such an assertion.

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Who or what Ossian really was may be a matter of conjecture; even if that were his right name may be made a subject of doubt. But that a poet existed, some two or three centuries before Christ, who wrote the immortal epic of Fingal, is just as certain as that, in ancient Greece, there dwelt some men who penned the Odyssey. Homer he is called; that may or may not have been his name; he may or may not have been blind in later years, as was Ossian; he may or may not have begged his bread from town to town; he may or may not have died in misery on the Island Chao; cities may or may not have contended for the honor of being his birthplace. All this may be historically true, or it may be legend but one irrefutable fact remains—the self-evident fact that some one, in the days when Homer is said to have lived, did compose the immortal epics that have come down to us upon the stream of classics lore from the most remote antiquity. They certainly were not fabricated in modern times and ascribed to a myth called Homer. And the same stands good in regard to Ossian and his works. By whomsoever they were composed, it certainly was not at the end of the eighteenth century by Mr. Macpherson.

I may add, in closing that it is a pity, for Macpherson's own sake, that he should have so foolishly marred his otherwise magnificent work. Had he been satisfied with the honest credit of a translator, his name would have gone down to posterity side by side with Pope and Lafontaine—he being greater as a translator than either of them.

FRANCO-IRISH LITTERATEURS.

(By An Occasional Correspondent.)

In glancing over the most attractive works that we have in the splendid French-Canadian literature of the past fifty years, one cannot help being struck by the remarkably large number (proportionately speaking) of Irish names that the most popular writers possess. Especially is it so in the domain of poetry. Apart from Cremazie, in the "fifties" and Frechette in the last half of the past century, few of the poets have risen to the first rank. Not that many of them have not written as delightful, as poetic and as perfect verses as these two, but because none of them wrote as much as Frechette and none had the happy combination of pioneer circumstances that surrounded Cremazie to help them to fame. But there is a long list of them, and none of them have published anything mediocre; they all have risen, at given moments (if only for one short flight) into the atmosphere of the sublime.

During the past few months, the Canadian press has been filled with extracts from the works of Emile Nelligan, and with biographical sketches of the young poet, whose bright spirit took too early a flight from earth to heaven. Like Davis, like Chatterton, like Keats, like Poe, the poet Nelligan died very young; but not until he had left behind him infallible proof of the genius that he possessed, and evidence of what he might have become if he had only lived to maturity. What a pity such a flower should have perished under the chill breath of spring frosts. His was a genuine Irish name.

Then we have James Donnelly. Nothing in French-Canadian letters surpasses his wonderful poems. They were the admiration and the astonishment of all who read them, as they appeared. But Donnelly,

though by education, and greatly in sentiment, was French, he was purely and simply Irish by parentage and character. Yet he has contributed priceless gems to the casket of French-Canadian letters.

In passing we might mention "Francoise," the eloquent and brilliant editress of that admirable literary publication—"Le Journal de Francoise." She, as all know so well, is Miss Barry. It is true, on her father's side, there is genuine Irish blood—but her education and her lofty ideals learned from her mother, and at the knees of the best and most religious teachers in our land, have enabled her to do miracles for French-Canadian literature and journalism.

There is not a more popular, more charming, more versatile pen in all Canada to-day than that which is wielded by that sweet and lovable "chronicler" of La Patrie, the now famous "Madeleine." She is Miss Gleason—pure Irish on her father's side, and having, as she delicately expressed it, "three lands to love—Ireland, France and Canada." When we peruse the delightful lives of the poet Gill, and think that his young spirit ranges the hills of poetry, wrapped in the golden mantle of the beautiful language of old France, we pause and ask how comes he by such a name? Yet he is a French-Canadian poet, and a son of the soil in the truest acceptance of the term.

It was only the other day that all literary France arose to acclaim and honor the morning star of French-Canadian letters—Mr. William Chapman His success, which culminated in honors from the French academy and decorations from the French Government, as his magnificent volume "Les Aspirations" appeared in Paris, is the most astounding in this century. With his English name, his Catholic principles, and his Canadian genius, he landed amongst the infidel litterateurs of France, and forced them to bow down in acknowledgment of his superiority. Nor did he lose aught on account of his glorious songs in honor of Christ.

As we reflect on all these things, we think what a golden bond of union these facts should establish between our two races in Canada.

ENTRANCE TO THE VATICAN.

As to the facility or the reverse of obtaining entrance to the Vatican, it is a curious fact that a Protestant lady, one of the many who have undertaken the arduous task of converting the Pope, did actually penetrate into the sanctuary of the apartment of Leo XII. (1823-1829).

Almost as incredible as the thing may seem, it is vouched for by Cardinal Wiseman in his "Recollections" and, I fancy, by Artand de Mentor. None the less, as things are, approach to the Pope is not easy. The Vatican has its bronze door and the gate of entrance opposite the Mint, and besides these two it has doors communicating with St. Peter's; that of the sculpture galleries and others. Of the two public entrances, one is for carriages, the other for pedestrians. Outside the latter, the bronze door, there are Italian carabinieri and Roman police in uniform and in civilian's clothes; doubtless the police take note of Vatican adherents from what they see, but their principal and obvious duty is that of public order, and they exercise it regularly.

At the door stands always a Swiss who, unless he recognizes a person, inquires the purpose of each one entering. Near him is a picket of the same guard. If those entering go up the stairway of Pius IX, on the

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right, they find a posse of carabineers who question them more closely. If they can pass these, they find more carabineers or Swiss at the foot and on the landings of the grand stairway leading to the Papal apartments. To enter this last they must cross a redoubting of guards of various sorts, chamberlains, lay and clerical, and intelligent servants, all in goodly number.

Each anteroom thereafter has its chamberlains of various order. The master of the chamber, the major-domo, or some other prelate or functionary of about equal rank, is generally on duty, as are the commanders of the various military corps. I will not speak of the watchful, incredulous eyes of Msgr. Bressan, the Papal private secretary, nor of the second private secretary, Don Pessini. Of course, everything is possible, even that the lofty walls built by mediaval Popes around what is now the garden villa, should be scaled, but this story of an anarchist or similar outrage at the Vatican is one of the commonplaces which are treated expressly as jokes in the telegraph room of the press at San Silverstrao, and which have been used as summer time "copy" for English and American papers year in and year out.—W. J. D. Croke, in Standard and Times.

A SAD LESSON.

To amuse herself and annoy her fellow workers, Beckie Lewis threw an unfilled squib or fuse into the stove in the Dickson squip factory at Priceburg, Pa., a few days ago. There was a little explosion and the squib hopped out of the stove and into a pail of liquid sulphur close by. Then there was another explosion, followed by a third, when 200 pounds of powder blew up, tearing the building into fragments. Nine employees were killed, including Beckie Lewis, several were injured, and great damage to buildings done.

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NOTES

THE PONTIFF'S KING All who visit the Eternal have the privilege of being to a Papal audience, are derelictly affected by the of the present Holy Father. His open and unaffected democratic way of dealing with the world, his love of the people for the laboring class, like of pomp, are all of manly heart and render the present Pontiff a worthy successor to the Pope whose record will be of the most glorious in the Church. It is also a source of joy to the Holy See by Christ's Vicar and an ordinary human potential was grand, Leo XIII was simple and unostentatious. One Pontiff is a descendant, another a descendant, it matters not. All that matters is, from Peter the first to Pius X., have been able representatives of

A CHAIR OF HISTORY Knights of Columbus seeing great and good work, evidence of their activity of a fifty thousand dollar for the establishment of a history in the Catholic U.S.A. Elsewhere in the world a detailed report proceedings connected with the amount, plate last week. There is a sign of the times, and a able one, in this. Of all profane learning, we know that is more important to the Catholic history. To the perfect knowledge on that subject, much of the day are to be assigned. knowledge of the principle and moral—of our history the next most essential for the Catholic to fully grasp the history of the Church connected therewith.

ST. PATRICK'S DIGNITY correspondent "Crux," in the last issue, dwelt upon the fact of St. Patrick's birth and titles. It was remembered that he called the fact that St. Patrick was of the Order of the Knights of Constantine and that hence the name of one of the most noble in corroboration of this, a Cologist, Professor Franz in a recent discourse, said "At the time of the birth of Saviour, the Irish were surpassed in culture, learning only by the Greeks and Romans. Their language was a rude dialect, without a letter even an alphabet, as was German and the Saxon. There existed, long before St. Patrick, a regular government with a well-balanced laws and the congress people assembled tri-annual halls of Tara—peer of the senate." This indicates that not St. Patrick a patrician, when he came to Ireland there an assembly the most which were of an order as