

THOMAS MOORE, THE IRISH POET.

A CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION.



THE present generation has developed a fancy for celebrating the centenaries of men of genius. Nearly twenty years ago we be-thought ourselves that a century had passed since the birth of Robert Burns; last year saw France and Switzerland doing similar honour to the memories of

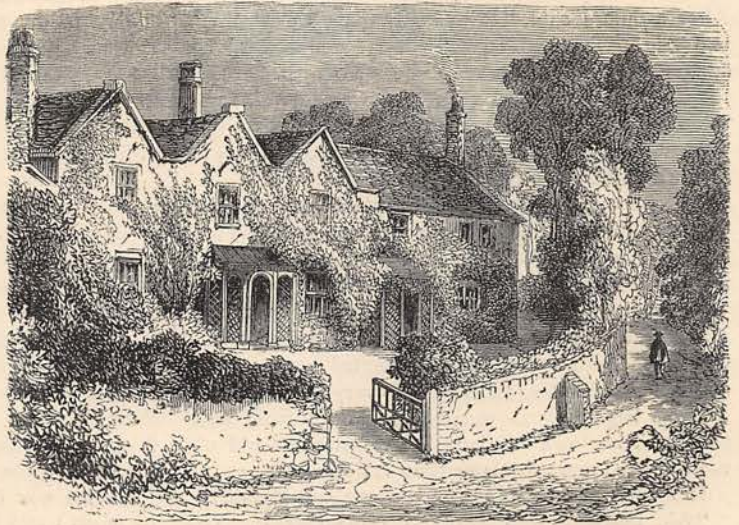
Voltaire and Rousseau; Captain Cook and Sir Humphrey Davy have been remembered, and their life-work recapitulated, since the commencement of 1879; and it is proposed to keep the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Thomas Moore, the Irish poet, whose statue in the Phoenix Park of Dublin adorns the city whence he sprung, on the 28th of May.

This son of Erin was as emphatically the poet of his race as Burns was of the Scotch, or Béranger of the Parisians, and unites the pathos and *naïveté* with the sly wit and eloquent speech which have always characterised the natives of the Emerald Isle. There are few who are not familiar with many of his Irish melodies, though his greater poetical works are less known to most readers than those of Tennyson and Browning, his prose ones are now seldom heard of, and his social and political squibs, piquant and sparkling as they were in their day, have faded almost out of remembrance. Yet the sprightly rhythm and wild cadences have the same *elan* as ever, and if the coming celebration raise once more before us the images of Kathleen and Norah Creina, of the Indian princess Lalla Rookh, the ubiquitous chamberlain Fadladeen, and the poet-lover of Cashmere, and if it make the "Epicurean" again a popular story-book, it will do good service to taste and culture.

The sweet singer himself was born amid the comfortably prosaic surroundings of a respectable shop in Aungier Street, Dublin, where grocery and strong waters were honestly retailed, and which is still an emporium of the same commodities. His father and

mother knew the value of education, and gave him a liberal one, by means of which his mind and talents were developed, and he was enabled to make his own way in the world, retaining always a warm affection for the parents whose homely virtues he heartily appreciated, and of whose humble station he was never ashamed. His first schoolmaster was one of the old-fashioned pedagogues who were equally devoted to the worship of whiskey and of the cane, and his second the well-known Samuel Whyte, who pronounced Sheridan an incorrigible dunce, but evoked admiration from our juvenile poet, who addressed some verses to him in his fourteenth year.

The period of Tom's childhood and youth might well be styled "troubulous times," for a spirit of unrest roused by the French Revolution and other causes was abroad. The smouldering fires of discontent were fed by the disabilities under which Roman Catholics laboured, and by the wrongs, imaginary or otherwise, over which Ireland persistently brooded. The worthy grocer skared in the restlessness and ferment of his surroundings, and occasionally attended those patriotic dinners at which men drank to the family "over the water," and waxed enthusiastic over such toasts as "May the breezes from France fan our Irish oak into verdure." Growing up in such an atmosphere, it was no wonder that when entered as a student of the



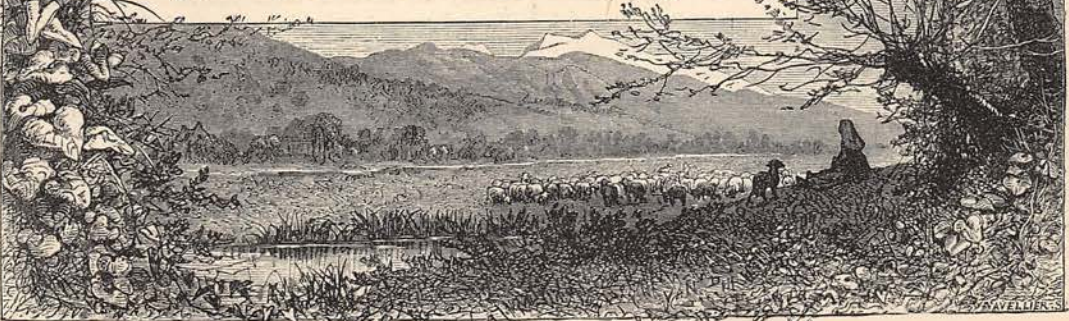
SLOPERTON COTTAGE (p. 347.)

Dublin University, in 1792, young Moore formed an acquaintance with the ill-starred Robert Emmett, John Brown, and other leading spirits, joined their debating societies, and came within an ace of imperilling his own life and liberty by the burning rhapsodies wherewith he exhorted his fellows to the "wearin' of the green" and "vengeance against the



oppressors." He had a great love of, and some talent for music, and was moved deeply by the old national airs, to which he afterwards wrote such charming words. It is said that Emmett once sat listening to him as he played over the stirring notes of the "Red Fox," and at the close started up and cried, "Oh, that I were at the head of twenty thousand men, marching to that air!" It is impossible to read the stanzas to which Moore wedded it in later years without recalling the rash young friend of his youth, with his dreams and aspirations, and his tragic end.

Boys are but foolish, and the Celtic blood, though generous, is hot, and suspicious circumstances arose which led Lord Fitzgibbon, the then Vice-Chancellor, to institute a searching inquiry among the undergraduates, the result of which was that a great



many were found to be deeply implicated in the Irish Union. It was thought necessary to act swiftly and sternly in some instances, but the charge was not pressed very closely against those who, if they had talked bombastically, had not actually compromised themselves; and among the number who escaped as it were by the skin of their teeth was Tom Moore, who thenceforward had the prudence to hold his tongue, and after taking his Bachelor of Arts degree found his way to England, entered his name at the Middle Temple, and finding the study of law sufficiently dry, bent all his energies to poetry; and in the year 1800, before he was one-and-twenty, published by subscription his translation of the Odes of Anacreon, which he dedicated to the Prince Regent.

Conversation, which like letter-writing is now said to be a lost art, flourished in those days; and the young poet's stream of bright, vivacious, witty talk served to a great extent as his passport into society. He made the acquaintance of several brother Irishmen, among whom was Martin Archer Shee, some time President of the Royal Academy; met with Peter Pindar and other lions of the London world; and, as a crowning piece of good luck, was introduced to Lord Moira, then in high favour at Carlton House. This nobleman obtained for him permission to dedicate his "Anacreon" to the Prince, and later on, in 1803, procured him the post of Registrar to the Admiralty Court at Bermuda. This was a definite position, for which he was grateful at the time, and he set sail in the frigate *Phaeton* for the shores on which Shakespeare lays the scene of "The Tempest," whose reefs and caves were the haunts of the monster Caliban, and among whose bowers the "delicate Ariel" sped to do the magician's bidding. He was entranced with the scenery of

———"this enchanted land,
These leafy isles upon the ocean thrown,
Like studs of emerald o'er a silver zone;"

and wrote of the "fairy harbour" of St. George, and the "first perfume of a cedar hill," with all the rapture of youth and poesy. But the routine of daily work was uncongenial, and in an evil hour procured a deputy to do it for him while he made a little tour in the United States and Canada, and returned to England, reaching home after an absence of only fourteen months. This visit to America was the sole period during his mother's life in which he did not write to her twice a week. Soon after his arrival in London he published a collection of odes, epistles, and fugitive poems, written while he was abroad, some of which are graceful, tender, rich in classical allusions, and bespeak a happy spirit, while others say sharp and bitter things about America, which were very much deprecated at the time, though one cannot help thinking that their sting lay in their truth.

On the 25th of March, 1811, Thomas Moore, who had then attained the discreet age of thirty-two, married the good and beautiful woman who survived him after more than forty years of wedded life. For about a year the couple hovered between London—which was presumably their home, and

where a little daughter was born to them—and Lord Moira's seat at Donnington Park, where they were welcome and familiar guests; and then, in order to be near his noble friend, Moore, who, according to the quizzical Byron, "dearly loved a lord," took a cottage in the neighbouring village of Kegworth, and on the peer's appointment to the Governorship of India, removed to Mayfield Cottage, near Ashbourne, a lovely spot, round which are entwined many memories of men whose names are household words, the chief of whom are Dr. Johnson, who there visited his friend Taylor; Rousseau, who botanised and wrote his "Confessions" at Wotton; and Izaak Walton, who was wont to wander about by the streams and rivulets, fishing-rod in hand and creel at back. The family circle was increased by another little girl, but their expenses were small, house-rent and taxes together cost them less than thirty pounds a year, provisions were cheap among the Derbyshire hills and dales, and the poet's prospects were bright enough to make his spirits buoyant and his home overflow with all the simple luxuries that loving hearts could wish for themselves and their children. He had made an arrangement with Mr. Power, under which he was to receive £500 a year for seven years for his "Irish Melodies," and an engagement with Messrs. Longman to write "Lalla Rookh" for the sum of £3,000. This poem he felt was to be the crowning work of his fame, and by the diligent reading of Eastern works and travels in the library of Donnington Park, aided no doubt by his own reminiscences of tropical scenery, he succeeded in imbuing his mind with the Oriental ideas and imagery portrayed with such wonderful fidelity in the four romances of which his *magnum opus* consists. It was ready for publication in 1816, and in order to see it personally through the press Moore removed with his family to a small brick-built house near Hornsey, with a pretty, shady garden. "Lalla Rookh" took the reading world by storm, and the banker-poet, Samuel Rogers, suggested that the successful author should reward himself for his well-earned triumph by accompanying him in a little trip to Paris—a much more formidable scheme than now. So pleasant an offer as a seat in Mr. Rogers' post-carriage was not to be refused, and the two friends started together. The peace which succeeded the battle of Waterloo, and exile of Napoleon, had let loose on the French capital a flood of English travellers who had been long enough restricted to the shores of their own country to become most eccentrically insular, and afforded very laughable studies of character to such citizens of the world as went among without being of them. No one was more keenly alive to ludicrous impressions than Moore, who collected ample materials for a humorous work entitled "The Fudge Family in Paris," which ran through many editions, and in its own line vied in popularity with "Lalla Rookh." Sorrow, however, was dawning for the home circle, for the eldest child was taken ill, and the mother had to recall her husband from his pleasures to the bedside of the little girl, who did not long survive her father's return, and was buried in

Hornsey Churchyard. In the autumn of that year Lord Lansdowne sent the poet word that he should like to have him for a neighbour, and that there was a suitable house to be had at Bromham, not far from his residence at Bowood. So he went down into Wiltshire, but found it to be a mansion more suited to a lord than to a man of genius who lived by his brains. But the journey was not by any means fruitless, for he saw on the road an abode which was all that he could desire, and sent his wife to inspect it too. This was the well-known Sloperton Cottage, near Devizes, which they took furnished at a rent of £40 per annum, and made their home for the rest of their lives, with the exception of three years spent abroad in consequence of the defalcations of Moore's agent in Bermuda, who, after long embezzling the proceeds of the post of Registrar, absconded and left his *chef* responsible for a sum of £6,000. The only resource left to him was to leave England, which he did by accompanying Lord John Russell, in September, 1819, to Paris and through Switzerland to Milan, where they parted company, the politician going to Genoa and the poet on a visit to Lord Byron at Fusina and Venice. At the beginning of the new year Mrs. Moore and her children rejoined him in Paris, between which city, Sèvres, and Passy they spent nearly three years, leading a gay, pleasant life, in which they saw many old friends and made some new ones. The literary productions of this period were the "Fables of the Holy Alliance," "The Loves of the Angels," and the "Epicurean," a prose poem, the scene of which is laid in Egypt. Meanwhile the whole family yearned for home and England, and towards the end of 1822 learned with infinite satisfaction that the American merchants had reduced their claim to 1,000 guineas, towards which the uncle of the dishonest deputy (by whom he had been recommended to Moore) was willing to contribute £300. A kind friend made up the remainder, but was repaid on the first opportunity, for when the poet received his publishers' account he had the pleasure of finding £1,000 placed to his credit from the sale of "The Loves of the Angels," and £500 from the "Fables of the Holy Alliance." So he paid off his obligations and returned to Sloperton, where he wrote his life of Sheridan, memoirs of Captain Rock and Lord Byron, a history of Ireland, and innumerable trifles, for which his name and the events of the day procured a certain amount of currency. Such were the "Twopenny Post Bag," a collection of supposititious epistles from great personages; a "Parody of a Well-known Letter," and similar tit-bits, which hit off the cha-

racter and pursuits of their putative writers to perfection, and gave rise to a popular notion that it was in very bad taste for Moore to quiz the Prince Regent and his associates, though no more valid reason could be given for this opinion than that the poet had occasionally dined at the Prince's table. He was one of the few men who in addition to genius have what has been called the habit of work, and as his political friends procured for him during a good many years a pension or annual allowance of £300, and he was able to boast of having made £30,000 by his writings, he always might have been in comfortable circumstances. But he loved to spend the London season fluttering about in fashionable society, where he was listened to, caressed, and flattered as long as he could amuse his titled hosts. Plain living and high thinking were not exactly to his taste, and had he not been mated with a prudent partner he would have been more extravagant than he was. We hear of his borrowing a house at Richmond from Lord Lansdowne, giving dinners and fêtes, and managing generally to spend whatever money could be saved at Sloperton. He survived all his children; the second daughter died when only seventeen, the third in infancy, and one son—a cadet in the East India Company's service—before he was twenty. The remaining son, for whom his father purchased an ensigncy and lieutenantcy, ruined his own constitution by riotous living, sold his commission, drew a sum of £1,500 from his parents for the payment of his debts, and then served under the French flag in Algeria, where he died in hospital of rapid consumption.

This was the last blow to the poet, whose health and memory rapidly declined, till he subsided into a tranquil childish state in which his triumphs and troubles were alike forgotten, and he seemed only conscious of the goodness of God, and the tender affection of the wife on whom he daily relied more and more for comfort and tendance. The end came on the 26th February, 1852, within a few months of the completion of his seventy-third year, and he was laid to his rest in Bromham Churchyard, by the side of two of his children, and within sight of his peaceful home. Warm of heart and temper, amiable and vain, witty and talented, his life was an alternation between laughter and tears; and taken altogether, perhaps he was neither more nor less than the typical Irishman, commanding equally the love, pity, admiration, and forbearance of his best friends, and of that posterity which sees more clearly, and judges more justly, than contemporaries ever do.

ELIZA CLARKE.

