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Title: Poetry and legendary ballads of the south of Ireland. Selections from the poems of Thomas Condon. Introduction

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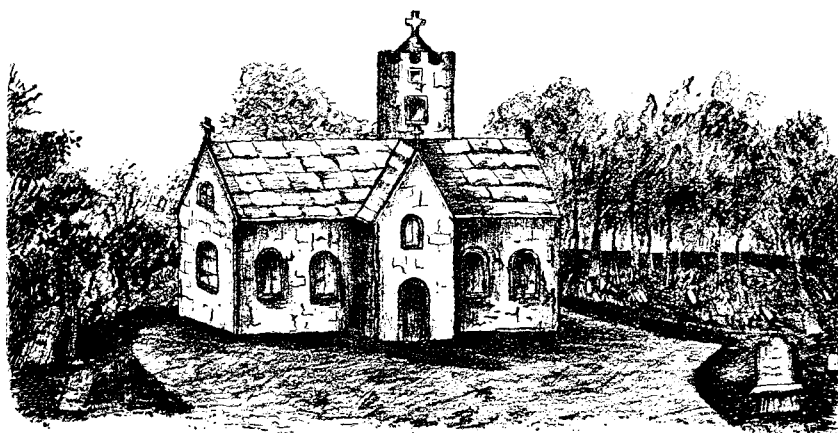
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*Selections from*  
**THE POEMS OF THOMAS CONDON.**

(BORN 1836. DIED 1864)



ANCIENT CATHEDRAL OF ST FIN BARR.  
(TAKEN DOWN 1734.)

“**C**ILL ABBEY ROCK,” as the street children of Cork still designate the seat of St. Fin Barr’s University, has clustering closely around it a number of interesting legends of the “ould times,” before the Queen’s College<sup>(1)</sup> was built or thought of. These legends of such places are just the proper material, if strung together in a presentable form for the people, to foster and keep alive the interest in the past, which is the chief culture of the poor who can afford no other, and have no better. They are an un-

<sup>(1)</sup> The old people did not at all relish the idea of the “Godless College” being built near good “Sin Barry’s burying-place,” as the site of it was. The late Dr. W. K. Sullivan—a man who loved his country and truly served his kind—chose for the motto of the college the legend: “Where Fin Barr. taught, let Munster learn.”

told treasure of pleasure to the old people, a luxury to the young, with a flavour not to be found in latter-day productions. One man in particular did much for Corkmen in this respect—Thomas Condon, the gifted author of *Gilla Hugh, or the Patriot Monk*. After all, people do not want very exquisite work to interest them, and in a country like Ireland, where rhymesters are common as blackberries (before the Phooka spoils them),<sup>(2)</sup> it is discouraging to watch how much excellent work is being done in material neither Irish nor local. Poetry does not pay the average producer, and, in the absence of statistics to the

<sup>(2)</sup> The tradition in the country is that blackberries are thickest on the 29th of September, on the night of which day the Phooka spoils them, and they are dangerous to eat after. They certainly are disagreeable after the late September rains.

contrary, it is to be presumed his guerdon is popularity—surely, from that motive alone, he ought do the work which lies nearest.

But Condon was no ordinary rhymester or newspaper poetaster; his is not the work of a skilled artizan, but that of a talented artist. Works of his entirely unknown to the public—a translation of *Dante*, which death prevented him from completing, and a beautiful rendering of St. Liguori's hymns—stamp him at once as a man of genius and culture. He was born in October, 1836, beyond the borders of Cork county, at Kilfinnane. In 1843 his family came to Cork, and took a house in Blackpool—then the thriving centre of the tanning industry of the city. He was sent to school under the Christian Brothers at Peacock Lane—and the very firstlings of his genius, the little volume of poems published just before his death, is dedicated to his two teachers, Brothers Wiseman and Alphonsus O'Dwyer. He intended becoming a priest, but family circumstances prevented him doing so. He was taught classics in the "select academy" kept in Robert Street by Healy, the well-known linguist. Condon possessed considerable talent for languages, and learned five continental languages, and was acquainted widely with European literature. Despite the tendency to let the fittest alone survive, he was too genuinely patriotic to forget the Gaelic, and his was a cunning and skilled hand in Irish caligraphy.<sup>(3)</sup> He was a clever

(3) Mr. C. Murphy, Buxton Hill, who kindly supplied me with details of Condon's life, possesses much of his MSS.

draughtsman,<sup>(4)</sup> and adopted civil engineering as a means of livelihood. He passed from the office of a local engineer, where he served his time, into Sir Thomas Deane's office in Dublin, from which he went to London in 1862. He was a man of good physique and above the medium height, with handsome face and eyes, which strangers remarked as peculiarly attractive. He was constitutionally delicate, and, having contracted and neglected a cold, his lungs became affected, and he had to throw up his business in London and return home. At the time he obtained a congenial appointment in Spain, with a large railroad contractor at Barcelona, but, through rapidly-failing health, had to cancel his engagement and return to Cork. For a little while he managed to keep up an appearance of vitality in and about the house in Sunday's Well, where his relatives lived for years. He died in the midst of friends, to whom he bequeathed many happy memories, and consoled by the teachings of religion, on the 9th of April, 1864.

The Celtic cross and epitaph in Irish characters over his grave in St. Joseph's cemetery are the design of his own friend, Mr. Long, of the Royal Irish Academy.

The first of his poems was published in a local paper when he was only twenty-one years of age. It deals with Blackpool, the scene of his boyhood, and is among the shorter poems published in this collection.

(4) Several of his drawings are on the walls of the Christian Brothers' Schools.

J. O'M.