

We see by the local journals that since his induction to the pastorate of Invercargill, the Rev. Father Higgins has made considerable improvements to the church in that town. Hitherto the accommodation inside the church was somewhat scant, and the external surroundings had assumed an aspect of decay, but the sacred building has now been considerably enlarged, the residence of the pastor repaired, and the grounds attached to the church have undergone a beautifying operation. All, however, is not yet finished, and although a new chancel, choir, and gallery, and an inner and outer sacristy have been added, a bell tower has still to be erected, for which, however, provision has been made.

NEWS IN BRIEF.

The quantity of coal consumed by an ocean steamer varies from 50 to 100 tons in the 24 hours.

The statute law of New York compels children who are capable of doing so, to relieve and maintain their parents when poor, old, lame, or not able to maintain themselves.

Three of the signers of the Declaration of American Independence were Irishmen—Mathew Thornton, of New Hampshire; and James Smith and George Taylor, both of Pennsylvania.

A person at Pike's Peak, writing to a Minnesota journal, says that the miners are very discouraged in that region. They have to dig through a solid vein of silver four feet thick before they reach the gold.

Of all the warm-blooded animals, the goose is the most rapid in its growth. Geese have been known to live to 100 years of age.

Lightning has been pressed into the service of man in Germany. An iron rod, planted perpendicularly in the rock which the engineer wished to blast, has attracted the electricity of the clouds to the base of the iron, where the lightning shivered to atoms the rock in which the iron was sunk.

The Duke of Westminster recently paid £15,000 for the race-horse Doncaster, rather than he should be secured by American or Continental buyers, who are always on the alert to purchase first-class thoroughbreds.

A hundred tons of mail matter are sent out from the Post-office of New York city every day; and its people consume every day 600 calves, 20,000 sheep, and 20,000 swine.

With improved machinery in America they can make a watch in three minutes. One company alone in that country turns out 80,000 watches in a year—more than are made in all England during the same time.

In December, 1873, a telegram was sent from New York to London, and an answer received back in 30 minutes, actual time. The distances travelled were as follows:—From New York to Heart's Content, N.F., 1300 miles; cable, 2000 miles; Valentia to London, 300 miles. Each of the telegrams travelled 3600 miles, and passed through the hands of 18 persons, so that in the short space of half-an-hour the two telegrams travelled the distance of 7200 miles.

England was the last country in Europe to abolish the barbarous custom of burning at the stake, an instance of which occurred so late as the ninth year of George II. Another barbarous custom, trials by battle, was abolished in England so late as 1820.

In the time of Henry VIII. an Irish hawk was worth its weight in silver. An Irish forest, however wild, which contained hawks' nests, was as valuable as a mine in California, owing to the high prices which the aristocracy of England and France paid for Irish falcons—a word which is in itself Irish, and comes from *faol*, "wild," and *con*, "a hound."

The Scallion derives its name from a place in Palestine, termed Ascalon, which produced the best onions in the world.

New York has two thousand newsboys.

The hat, as an article of man's attire, was invented in Paris, by a Swiss, in 1404.

The number of newspapers at present in circulation throughout the United States is estimated at 5000, being at the rate of one for every 5,800 inhabitants.

Greek fire is supposed to have been composed of naphtha, pitch and sulphur. It is said to have been invented by Callinicius of Heliopolis, about the year 670, and to have been used with terrible effect against the Saracens. The peculiarity of the Greek fire was that, on being exposed to the air, it burst into flames, and burned under water.

No one after the deluge passed the age of 464 years, which was not half the age of Methuselah, who attained the age of 969 years. Terah, who died B.C. 1921, was the last who exceeded the 200. Since his time but few instances of men attaining one hundred years are recorded. In modern times, the oldest inhabitants of the globe known in authentic history are to be found among the slaves of the West Indies. Allison, the historian, speaks of some of these slaves in Jamaica who attained the age of 180.

A new motor, said to rival the Keeley motor, is in operation in Hamilton, Canada. The motive power consists of nine parts of air, and one of coal-gas, which operates as an explosive. The inventor challenges the Keeley motor to a trial.

The Rothesay correspondent of the 'South Wales Daily News' telegraphs that Lady Flora Hastings has become a Catholic. This young lady is cousin to the Marquis of Bute and eldest daughter of the recently deceased Countess of Loudoun. She is past 21 years of age, and has been spending the winter in the Isle of Bute, where her guardians, the Marquis of Bute and Lady Bute, have been residing.

It is a curious fact that the news of the shipwreck of the steamer Schiller off Scilly Isles, came to England from New York. The ubiquitous correspondent of the 'New York Herald' was the first to obtain the tidings; he telegraphed at once to New York, and from the office of the 'New York Herald' the news was telegraphed back to the 'Evening Standard.' It is rather humiliating to think that news from the south of England should reach London via New York. It does not say much for the enterprise of English journalism.

THE DRAMA.

THE novelty of the week has been the long-promised play by Mr. J. J. Utting, of "Check and Counter Check, or The Fall of Richmond," which was produced at the Queen's Theatre on Monday evening last. We understand that the drama was written expressly for Mr. and Mrs. Bates, and that—taking into consideration the fact that they were both Americans—the piece was to be "written up for their special advantage; but after seeing "Check and Counter Check," we come to the conclusion that they have not by any means two of the best parts. The drama is in three acts, and treats of incidents which may be supposed to have taken place during the American war. We say "supposed," because many of the incidents of "Check and Counter Check" are highly improbable, and extremely inconsistent. Nevertheless, its production may be pronounced a success, if we may judge from the very liberal amount of applause bestowed upon it by the audience. Taking it as a whole, we must confess to a feeling of disappointment—not at its dramatic construction, but at its literary merit. The language is exceedingly common-place throughout; the "funny business," a considerable portion of it, is very flat; but the "situations" are undoubtedly good, particularly at the end of every act, where we have effective grouping and tableaux,—“pictures,” we think, they are professionally termed,—with virtue triumphant, and villainy outwitted. A few words as to the plot, which is bad, in our opinion, to start with, because the subject is so thoroughly hackneyed. A certain Clara Courtney is living with her guardian in New York. She is beloved by a Captain Danvers, in the North American army; but her guardian, having himself resolved to wed her, causes the arrest of Danvers, who is forwarded to the front. In his absence, tormented by Manners, Clara and her ward proceed to the seat of war in search of Danvers, who is among the missing. Manners being foiled in his resolve to obtain possession of the girl, plots the destruction of Frank, by himself communicating with the rebels in a mask so like Danvers, that when the accusation is made against him he is convicted on what appears to be the clearest possible testimony, and ordered away for execution. Clara then resolves, at all hazards, to save her lover's life, and rides post haste to meet General Grant, who is advancing with a general body of the troops on Richmond. In the meantime, Manners' plot is partly discovered, and a reprieve is granted by the General in command; while Manners himself now goes over to the enemy. A sword is placed in Danvers' hand, the drums are sounded, and an attack made upon the outward posts of the famous South American capital. Manners, now in command of a party of rebels, comes upon the scene, and plants a Southern flag upon the fort; but this Reuben Gherkins (the low comedy man) tears down, and at the same time tears off the mask from the Colonel's face. He is then confronted by Danvers, a conflict takes place, and the villain is killed. At the same time the heroine rushes on with the pardon, the Southern soldiers are "fixed" by the Northerners, the red fire blazes up, the company generally cheer, the band strikes up "Hail Columbia," and the curtain falls. We dare say if the last scene were well got up it would prove very effective on a large stage, but we must confess that this and one or two others in the play are too much on the *ad captandum* principle to please us. We want something more than the eye pleased;—we want the mind satisfied. There is a considerable current of under-plot to which we have not alluded. Mrs. Bates, as Clara Courtney, acted as she always does—gracefully and well, and sang the song incidental to her part "Happy be thy Dreams" very prettily. Mr. Bates, as Reuben Gherkins, the travelling photographer, came in for a good share of the applause. While Mr. Stoneham, as the young officer, Danvers, has seldom appeared to better advantage. The other parts call for no special comment, but we might say that Mr. Keogh made a good deal out of the small part of General Ellis. On the whole, while we may very well state that "Check and Counter Check" is not, as a work of real merit, to be compared with Mr. Darroll's "Trump Card," we think it is a capital acting drama, and congratulate the author upon its undoubted success. There were two or three calls after every act, and the calls for the author at the end of the second were loud and prolonged, but it was not until the conclusion of the play that Mr. Utting came forward and bowed his acknowledgments, and addressed a few words to the audience, thanking the management, Mr. Bates, the company, and the band, for the way in which they each and severally worked together to make the drama a success. The play was repeated on Tuesday, and on Wednesday was withdrawn to make room for the "Man with the Iron Mask," but will be played again for the last time on Saturday. We hear that Mr. Utting has just concluded a new drama called "Redemption," of which he speaks himself in glowing terms, while, we believe, we are correct in stating that his own estimate of "Check and Counter Check" is by no means a high one. We hope therefore to have "Redemption" placed upon the boards, as we shall then, we believe, see this young author at his best.

A WONDERFUL CLOCK.—A marvellous piece of mechanism, in the way of clocks, is described in the French journals. It is an eight-day instrument, with dead-beat escapement maintaining power. It chimes the quarters, plays sixteen tunes, plays three tunes every twelve hours, or will play at any time required. The hands go round as follows:—one, once a minute; one, once an hour; one, once a week; one, once a month; one, once a year. It shows the moon's age, the rising and setting of the sun, the time of high and low water, half ebb, and half flood, and by a beautiful contrivance, there is a part which represents the water, which rises and falls, lifting some ships at high-water tide as if they were in motion, and, as it recedes, leaves these little automaton ships dry on the sands. The clock shows the hour of the day, day of the week, day of the month, month of the year; and in the day of the month there is provision made for the long and short months. It shows the signs of the zodiac; it strikes or not, chimes or not, as may be desired; and it has the equation table, showing the difference of clock and sun every day of the year.