

House of Commons drove from office one of the cleverest and most plausible and dangerous politicians of the age. In return for this, he turned fiercely against the Pope and all his belongings; and if his power had been equal to his will, he would probably have kindled the flames of war in Europe to uphold the interests of his party, unless I greatly misunderstand the drift of his "pamphlets," which may be the case. Happily he is not likely again to possess the power of working evil. His hard words will break no bones. Even in this colony the wholesome influence of the Roman Catholic citizen on public affairs is not unfelt in contested elections, when parties are evenly balanced or divided. It was notoriously by the Catholic vote that the late Mr. J. Williamson was placed in the Superintendent's Chair of Auckland on the last occasion of his election, in the hope that he would secure to Catholics justice in the School question—a hope which was doomed to be disappointed. Rightly or wrongly, the Catholic party in Dunedin got the credit of returning a member to the House of Representatives in opposition to Mr. Barton. "It was not my opponent, but Dr. Moran," said Mr. Barton, "who defeated me." Dr. Moran it seems was innocent; but the imputation showed the power of the Catholic party in Mr. Barton's opinion. They owe him thanks for the compliment.

Auckland.

LATC.

CONCERNING THE QUEEN'S THEATRE.

DURING the days of our boyhood we recollect that there were still maintained in the environs of Dublin yearly *Saturnalia*, which, under the name of Donneybrook Fair, had gained a wide-spread but most unenviable notoriety, and whither, for the space of a week towards the end of summer, flocked the scum of the adjacent city. The scene was generally avoided by well-disposed people, but if occasionally a reputable individual was weak enough to allow himself to be overcome by the attractions of the hurly-burly and to pay it a visit, he went there in conscious shame, as Britons of respectability, who yield to the license of foreign travel will now and then venture to enter the *Jardin Mabille*, cringing through the "fierce light" that illumines the pavement before its gates, and repairing with all speed to a retired corner whence they may from a safe distance view the orgies of the situation. But to the boyish mind, Donneybrook during the fair week presented a paradise of delights, and many a truant found his way there determined on enjoying to the top of his bent a treat for which the ferule of the pedagogue or some parental weapon of cane or leather would be sure to exact a penalty. Varied and intense were the pleasures of the place. There were endless rows of booths, wherein whisky and beer flowed *ad libitum*, and whose floors were provided with boards, that echoed to the foot of the dancer from sunrise to sunset, and in all probability right through to sunrise back again; lanes there were of boiling pots, containing comfortable victuals—bacon, cabbage, and potatoes; rows of stalls piled high with ginger-bread, cakes, and fruit, most tempting to the appetite that did not object to stickiness whose cause was unknown, and a general suspicion of mould and uncleanness. There were merry-go-rounds and swings, boats that described a circle in the air, and games wholly indescribable, without number; but chief amongst the many wonders were the rambling theatres, whereof an unheard of quantity had assembled to reap a harvest, gathered in coppers, at the fair. These latter formed a striking feature in the spectacle, grotesque and not altogether unpicturesque outwardly, whatever might be its moral aspect, for their *dramatis personæ*, their harlequins and columbines, their clowns and mountebanks, their trumpets and big drums did not confine themselves to the interior of the structure wherein they performed, but now and then they sallied forth upon a platform erected in front of this, and there went through a variety of histrionic exercises, by which when they had sufficiently whetted the curiosity of a crowd of spectators, they retired within, drawing after them a numerous audience, who paid at the doors and were rewarded by beholding much that was entertaining, if it did not tend directly to edification.

We had hardly expected to be reminded of our school days in this far off land, but a vision of Donneybrook Fair has been once more extended before our eyes, and has, alas, reminded us sadly of the lapse of time. The riot of youth has fled: like the bark of Moore's song, we are stranded upon the beach, and the waters have subsided, leaving us face to face with sober fact, unable to call up from inner depths a halo wherewith to gild a leprous object, and capable of being fully disgusted with all that is disgusting. "Sugar plums" have come to us too late, according to the saying of Lord Lytton; but we suspect that at any time of our lives the plaster of Paris would have been plainly discernible in such bonbons as those recently set before us. We have, in a word, seen "Conrad and Lizette," and a more revolting farrago of rubbish never came in any shape under our observation.

A female part represented by a male, and not altogether inoffensive to delicacy, senseless lilt, jests void of point or pungency, tuneless voices, silly antics. A Dutchman chattering stupidities in a tiresome jargon, suggestive too of the parish fool driven to bay by mischievous urchins, and defending himself by jabbering and grimaces. An Irish character, likewise, copied from a model, the habitué of some low miserable shanty; a scurvy creature all tatters and ribaldry, who tries to awaken mirth by a coarse and loathsome repetition of idiotic drivel; such are the attractions presented to the public in the piece we speak of.

For our own part, on leaving the theatre where we had witnessed the production in question, we felt as if we had stepped ankle deep in unsavory mire, or been spat up, or as if, with reprehensible moral obliquity having forsaken, for a season, our decorous path through life, we had assisted at a dog-fight.

TELEGRAMS.

(From our Daily Contemporaries.)

London, February 4.

The Porte agrees to negotiate with Montenegro on the basis of *statu quo* with the cession of certain territory. Agreement of the Porte with Serbia is doubtful, owing to the Turkish demands for a guarantee. A Russian circular has been issued, expressing the desire of Russia to maintain Europe's accord, and asking, before stating her decision, what course the Powers intend pursuing in view of the Porte's rejection of their demands.

A numerously attended meeting on the Eastern Question was held preparatory to the re-opening of Parliament, at which the conduct of Earl Salisbury at the Conference was generally approved.

The Liberals censure the earlier policy of Earl Beaconsfield and Lord Derby, but it is not expected that any attempt will be made to overthrow the Government. Such a course would be unpopular, and not likely to succeed.

THE BROOKLYN BURNING.

ON Tuesday, the 5th December, while the play of "The Two Orphans" in the Brooklyn Theatre was drawing to a close, a fire broke out up among the hanging drapery over the stage. A hole in the gas pipe had been stopped on the previous day with a wooden plug, and this having dropped out the stream of gas ignited from a neighboring burner, and set fire to the painted canvas flies. "I was standing," says Mr. Thorne, one of the actors, "at the wing just out of sight of the audience, waiting my turn to go on the stage, when, on glancing up, I noticed a speck of flame not larger than my two hands among the hanging flies—about the fourth tier back from the front of the stage. One of the attendants got a long pole and endeavored to beat it out, but the ignited material being almost as combustible as powder, the flames spread with wondrous rapidity, leaping from fly to fly, and licking them up, as though they had been so many shavings." At that moment the attention of the audience was riveted on the stage, where an affecting scene was represented. The actress, Miss Kate Claxton, lying at the time on a pallet of straw, looked up and saw the flames, still hidden from the entranced audience, rapidly spreading among the flies. With wonderful self-restraint she lay there for several moments, carrying on the play. But suddenly the dreadful cry of "Fire!" was heard; there was a rush of feet behind the scenes; a piece of burning canvas fell upon the stage; the flames burst into sudden view above, licking across the painted scenery with awful rapidity; the courageous actors coming to the front of the stage, tried to calm the audience; but the sight of the devouring fire had destroyed reason; the people rose and rushed for dear life, yelling and screaming and tearing each other in their wild efforts to escape a fearful death. It was a hideous animal scurry and struggle. The weak fell and were trampled to death. Women and children had no chance. The stairways were blocked up with heaps of people, most of them crushed to death, preventing the escape of those behind. The wind roared through the burning theatre, sucked in by the horrid vortex of the fire. One who escaped says that in two minutes after the first alarm the floor of the theatre was slippery with blood; he passed over human bodies three deep, as he fled to the door; and he heard the bones breaking of the trampled wretches under foot, and from many the last piteous appeal, "O God, have mercy on my soul!" The flames with a frightful sweep spread around the walls and across the ceiling. The pungent and deadly smoke from the painted wood and canvas was almost fire itself. There were four hundred people in the upper gallery, and before twenty of them had reached the stairs the gallery was hemmed in with fire. One man drew a pistol and blew out his brains, preferring this death to being roasted alive. Strong men dragged down the weaker in frantic selfishness. Agile men sprang on the heads of the dense mass and flung themselves desperately down the packed stairway. One man who jumped from the gallery to the dress circle, and saved his life, says:—"It was a tremendous jump, but I made up my mind to do it. I jumped and struck on a seat, cutting myself severely. I made a rush for the door, and saw men trampling on women that were lying insensible on the stairway. They didn't stop to pick them up—they seemed crazy. I saw women who were unable to move, crying and praying." Fire-Engineer Farley says:—"I have seen a great many fires, and have seen men go to their death at fires, but I never saw a sight like this before. The men and boys in the gallery acted like so many wild beasts; they were jumping over each other, some howling with fear, others cursing and fighting." Then came the crowning horror, with an agonised cry from hundreds of despairing hearts: the stairs gave way, and the upper gallery, with its crowd of human beings, went crashing down to the sea of fire in the cellar, in which the lives of four hundred people were instantly extinguished.

It was next morning before work could begin on the ruins. The report telegraphed through the country, which appeared next day, said "fortunately no lives were lost." How such a report could be spread deserves investigation. The terrible truth that followed horrified the country. The digging out and identification of the charred bodies was a dismal scene. Brooklyn was in utter mourning. Two of the brave actors who had tried to pacify the audience were burned to death. The destroyed lives were mostly young—the average age being 21 years. Over 100 remained unidentified—perhaps too far burned for a possibility of identification—and these were buried with great public solemnity on last Saturday.—'Pilot.'