

train. It stops at no station in its onward rush, yet its annual passage through the Christmas period gives to youth and old age alike a brief glimpse, as it were, of an oasis of green trees and sparkling waters after long months of more or less arid toil and grind. The innocent joys associated with this gentlest feast of all the year have entered so intimately into our social life at the close of this century, that we can scarcely realise that even in 'Merrie England' at one period any observance whatsoever of Christmas was placed under a legal ban. Both in England and Scotland the old religious observance of the festival was swept away by the Reformation. The old-time social and domestic usages, however, long survived. Under the Puritan régime Christmas was observed as a day of solemn fast. Parliament met to transact business on Christmas Day; stringent orders were given that shops should be opened and markets be held; Christmas decorations were forbidden; the chiming of bells was made a legal offence; preaching or holding religious services on that day was punishable with imprisonment and fine; in Scotland feasting and resting from work were penalised; and, generally speaking, no effort was spared to blot out the memory of this ancient anniversary from the minds of the people.

The days of the anti-Christmas crusade died with the Restoration. The spiritual significance of the festival was, however, gone; but many of the old social and domestic customs of Catholic days have survived or been revived in lands and homes where the true purpose and spirit of the festival have been forgotten for over three hundred years. CHARLES DICKENS stands forth as the new apostle of kindly Christmas greetings and good-will. He was instrumental in bringing back to the life of English-speaking peoples of our day more of the genial warmth of the old Catholic 'merrie Chrystemasse' than they had known since the days of the Reformation. The revival of the old Christmas idea shows itself in a thousand various ways. Thus far it is marked by a mere—but kindly—feasting and merry-making, and by a steady annual increase in the interchange of friendly gifts and greetings. The purely human element predominates vastly; but all this neighbourly courtesy and friendship and affection and generosity form a ladder by which in due time the happy multitudes will, we trust, rise to the higher ideal of the Christmas festivities. Religious verse is already here and there and gradually working its way into the Christmas cards; Christmas celebrations have already secured the force of custom in most Anglican churches; other denominations show signs of following the lead; and we may in time hope to see many of our separated brethren so far 'undo the work of the Reformation' as to adopt in part or in whole the Catholic conception of the spiritual significance of this great festival. To the Catholic mind in old England there lay a world of meaning in the greeting—now revived—of 'a merry Christmas.' It was, in effect, simply a modern variant of St. Paul's inspired conception of the joy that should ever be present to those that couple true belief with righteous works: 'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.' We wish all our readers a full and flowing measure of this sacred joy. 'Tiny Tim's' brief but glorious prayer was this: 'God bless everybody!' The infantile mind grasped the splendid significance of the great doctrine which the Divine Babe of Bethlehem came to preach—the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God. The gentle child's prayer thus becomes this festival in an altogether special way. And with him we say from our hearts: 'God bless everybody!'

DIOCESE OF DUNEDIN.

Mr. Walter Kirby, the well-known New Zealand tenor, sang at High Mass at St. Joseph's Cathedral on Sunday.

A successful sale of work in connection with the St. Vincent de Paul Society took place in St. Joseph's Hall on Wednesday afternoon.

The extern pupils of St. Dominic's College held their annual outing at Outram on Tuesday. The party were conveyed to their destination in drags, and a very pleasant day was spent.

A capital entertainment was given at Mosgiel last night (Wednesday) by leading talent from Dunedin in aid of the funds of the local Convent of the Sisters of Mercy. Several of the city and visiting clergy were present, and the affair was a pronounced success. A report will appear in our next issue.

A conversazione was held in Hanan's Hall, Invercargill, on Wednesday evening of last week in aid of the funds of the Marist

Brothers' School. There was a large attendance, the building being crowded. Vocal and instrumental selections were given, games of various kinds were engaged in, and a most enjoyable evening was spent.

On Thursday afternoon of last week the annual breaking-up entertainment and distribution of prizes at St. Joseph's primary school, Dunedin, took place. The prizes were distributed by the Rev. Father Murphy, several other of the clergy being also present. An excellent programme, consisting of choruses and recitations, was gone through by the pupils, who acquitted themselves in a very creditable manner.

A song recital, in which some of our leading vocalists will assist, will be given by Mr. Walter Kirby in the Choral Hall on Friday evening. This will be Mr. Kirby's first public appearance in Dunedin, and will very likely be his last for a time, as he is about to proceed Home immediately for the purpose of placing himself under the tuition of Mr. Santley. Mr. Kirby toured the Australian colonies some time ago in company with Mdlle Trebelli. He gave a successful concert in Christchurch recently, when he received very flattering notices from the local Press. Among those who have promised to assist at Mr. Kirby's concert are Misses Rose Blaney, K. Moloney, Mrs. Holmes, and Messrs. Schacht and Jago.

The Very Rev. J. Ryan, S.J. (Rector of St. Francis Xavier's College, Kew, Melbourne), the Rev. T. Colgan, S.J., and the Rev. Father Geary arrived in Dunedin by the Waikare on yesterday (Wednesday) morning. Father Ryan remains in Dunedin to conduct a retreat at the Dominican Priory. Father Colgan proceeds to Timaru to open a retreat for the community of the Sacred Heart at Timaru. As may be seen by reference to our advertising columns, he opens a retreat for ladies on January 8. Father Geary is one of the two young priests whom Bishop Verdon secured for work in the diocese of Dunedin. His rev. confrère, Father Hearn, remained at Invercargill.

The Garrison Hall was fairly well filled on Monday night, when a benefit concert was given on behalf of the widow and family of the late Mr. A. Carter. As a great many more tickets were sold than were represented by the attendance, it is anticipated the efforts of those who organised the entertainment will be fairly successful. The programme submitted was a good one, and included items from most of our leading vocalists, who are ever ready to assist in any deserving cause. After an orchestral item the pupils of the Christian Brothers' School gave a gymnastic exhibition, under the direction of Mr. Smith, with their usual precision and success. Mr. E. Eagar, who sang with such success in Invercargill a short time ago, contributed two songs in his usual finished manner. Miss F. Brewer was honoured with an encore for her singing of 'When the heart is young.' A similar compliment was paid Mrs. R. Hudson, jun., for her vocal item. Miss Rose Blaney gave an artistic rendering of 'Close to the threshold' with violin obligato by Mr. Coombs, and was equally successful in a duet with Mr. Jago. Mrs. J. H. Coombs and Miss Morrison contributed vocal items, which were warmly applauded. A very pleasing duet was given by Mrs. Hudson and Miss Brewer. Mr. J. Jago gave two songs during the evening, both of which were redemanded. A pianoforte duet was played with taste by Misses S and N. Hall, and a violin solo by Miss May Donaldson, who was encored. Mr. Hanlon scored a decided success in his recitation 'Wilfred Denver's dream,' which was enthusiastically encored. The accompaniments were played by Miss Moloney and Messrs. F. H. Stokes and J. C. Easton.

OBITUARY.

MRS. RODGERS, CHRISTCHURCH.

It is with deep regret we have to announce the death of Mrs. Rodgers, wife of Mr. W. Rodgers, senr., of the Railway Department, Christchurch, which occurred on the 9th inst. The deceased lady was born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1826, and was the daughter of the late Captain Feeney, of Carrickfergus. Mrs. Rodgers arrived in New Zealand in 1875. She resided for a time in Timaru, where she was well known and respected, but later on settled down in Christchurch. The funeral took place on the 12th inst. in the Catholic portion of the Linwood Cemetery, the Rev. Father Crotty, who attended the deceased during her illness, officiating at the grave. The remains, which were followed by a large number of friends, were borne to the grave by four sons of the deceased—Mr. W. Rodgers (Invercargill), Mr. J. Rodgers (stationmaster at Oxford), Mr. E. Rodgers (Timaru), and Mr. C. Rodgers (Invercargill). The deceased leaves also two daughters (Mrs. Jones, of Sydenham, and Mrs. Maher, of Oxford). The family received several letters of condolence, including one from the local branch of the Hibernian Society, of which society Mr. W. Rodgers, junr., and Mr. C. Rodgers are past presidents.—R.I.P.

His Lordship Bishop Doyle, of the Grafton Diocese, celebrated his fiftieth birthday on December 5. The 25th anniversary of his landing in Australia will take place on the 31st of next month, he having landed in Melbourne on January 31, 1875. On the voyage he was shipwrecked on the Spanish coast, and had to return to London. On his arrival he was appointed to take charge of the Armidale Cathedral, where he remained until June 24, 1878. On that date he left for his new mission, arriving in Casino on June 29, the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul. Seeing at once the central position of Lismore he made it his headquarters, and one of his first acts was to agitate for the establishment of a municipality there. It was with difficulty that 500 souls were obtained in an area of six square miles. Now the population is over 5000. It is the intention of his Lordship's friends to celebrate in a fitting manner the 25th anniversary of his landing on the last day of next month.

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