

Irish News

OUR IRISH LETTER

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, December, 1905.
The New Zealand Football Team.

The fate of the Russian Emperor hangs in the balance; the miseries of hundreds of thousands of the unemployed in Russia, Poland, Germany, England—and here at our own doors—are awakening fears in the hearts of thinking men and sadness in the hearts who can feel for the sufferings of their fellow-beings: a Government is going out amid the hopes and fears of statesmen, of hungry place-hunters, while thousands of true Irishmen eagerly watch the signs of a changing English Cabinet and feel a tightening of the heart or a rising of hope as the name of this politician or that is mooted in public in connection with posts that signify much to anxious watchers. As I write, all these are balanced between hope and despondency. But yet, all Europe may be in danger of wars, of bankruptcy, the signs and groans and head-shakings of those who read the Last Day in the signs of the times and smell brimstone each time the wind changes are heard and seen, yet all is as nothing while the 'All Blacks,' the New Zealand footballers, are in the land. These latter are the excitement of the hour: the newspapers are full of them and all the world seems talking of them, of their fine physique, their endurance, their training, and, above all, their marvellous compactness (I earnestly hope that's the proper word) of discipline that makes them play as one man, having one idea, one impulse, one common mind, so that in the field they seem to act as if an invisible electric cable connected all their brains and muscles and inspired each individual to play up exactly and precisely to the move best adapted to the play of every other individual in their team. I regret I cannot attempt any graphic account of the great match, to which 20,000 Irish gathered from all counties 'to see their country suffer,' as 'The Irish Football and Athletic World' put it neatly. A noted footballer gallantly undertook to coach me in the matter, but I felt it would be useless. I know I could not learn Greek in one day, still more impossible would it be to understand in a day the terms of Rugby football.

I heard an immense deal about the New Zealand team and followed their all-conquering record through England, Ireland, and Scotland; learned how sorely the English grieved to find that it was no use trying to score anything, the 'All Blacks' were everywhere Gullivers among the Liliputians: learned with pleasure that the Irish took their beating as they should, generously and full of enthusiastic admiration for their conquerors. But I did not learn the game; I only came out of it really knowing two things, namely, that I rejoiced in my heart I was not under in any of the scrummages and that in their hearts the Irish bore no grudge, but were genuinely free from meanness as regards the New Zealanders. The only meanness I heard of was on the part of the Dublin committee of management, with whom, it is whispered, religious bigotry could not be kept out of even such a thing as sport, and that T.C.D. carefully excluded from the Irish team noted footballers from Catholic circles whom the New Zealanders would have been well pleased to play against as being antagonists more worthy, more capable of meeting them.

A Benefit Society.

The other day a little doll took me in hands and led me to make some inquiries about a society that, in a comparatively short period, has spread throughout Ireland, and from Ireland to many other countries.

There are amongst us many zealous Catholic clergy who find all sorts of ingenious ways for helping on the struggling good works they undertake for the salvation of souls. Amongst these good works are boys' clubs which, in wise hands, are the means of making thousands of respectable citizens. Dolls, well-dressed dolls, are of immense assistance to one energetic priest. The whole parish periodically starts doll-dressing; there is fierce competition in the doll show, unlimited purchases follow, and the results are most gratifying, although the youths who are helped, taught, amused, safe-guarded in their clubs never cast a thought to the fact that they owe almost all these good things to dolls.

I was applied to lately by a kind-hearted Protestant lady, anxious to help the good Father, to find for her

an Irish Forester, that she might reproduce the costume on a doll; 'Father'—was so anxious to have one such.' This led me to think and inquire about the society, of which my early impressions were that it was simply a sort of masquerading business, liked by handsome, well-made young tradesmen because of the very striking costume which metamorphosed a man into a romantic looking copy of some hero of long ago; a being clad in a gold-laced hunting coat with white facings and gold buttons, white cloth small clothes, well shaped top boots with gold tassels and handsome Tyrolean felt hat with a long white ostrich plume; fine for effect in processions, but of no significance whatsoever, save for stage effect. But the little doll sent me off on an inquiry, the result of which was that I learned of what vast importance amongst our working classes these beautifully decked out Irish Foresters are and how widespread is the charity of the working classes one for another, for this society is but one of many, all with the one aim, brotherly charity, and all having the sanction of the Church.

Ireland was long ago denuded of its forests, partly to supply British trade at the expense of the native Irish, partly because, in days of persecution, the Irishry, the hunted natives, the once owners of those vast woods and rich plains, took refuge in the forests and thence made periodical descents upon their own beef and mutton. In those days we had hungry human wolves, made so by cruel Penal Laws, and hungry four-footed wolves, and those Penal Laws offered £5 for the head of a wolf or a Papist rebel. When the forests were cut down and exported, the poor Irish no longer had shelter, save in the cold recesses of their mountains. Ireland never again had genuine forests, and so, at the present day, though the name and the picturesque costume suggest a free life under the greenwood tree, winding of horns, etc., our National Foresters do not range woods or hunt deer. No. Brother Chief Ranger and Brother Sub-Ranger, let us say of Cullenswood (we still have the district of that name, but it is now a populous suburb, the woods represented by small back gardens) are honest tradesmen working hard for a living, wearing on ordinary days Irish frieze and Irish tweed, and only seen in their gallant attire in national processions or at their own picnics. And they are a gallant body, for when hunger pinches the poor Brother out of work, when sickness falls upon his household, then the Chief Ranger and other Rangers hunt from house to house, helping the needy and comforting the widow and the orphan.

A Record of Progress.

Only twenty-eight years ago this Irish Foresters' Benefit Society was formed, having a small beginning of three Courts: Court Home Rule, Court Industry, and Court Wolfe Tone, which took for their motto the noble words, Unity, Nationality, Benevolence. There are now 574 off-shoots of these Courts, all working for the same Unity, Nationality, Benevolence, at home and abroad. A report of the society tells us that its annual income is now £68,000 and that within the last year £39,000 were paid in benefits, the amount thus dispensed since 1884 being £330,000. All that is required of members is that they shall be 'Irishmen, or the descendants of Irishmen, and that Irish they shall remain.' The Irish Foresters are large supporters of home industries, and in less than twenty years have spent £60,000 on clothing, etc., all of which must be of Irish manufacture, so that the society helps on the Irish working man not only in sickness and when out of work, but helps to keep him in employment.

Thus we see what one alone of the many benevolent societies does in this country, whose innumerable, ever-flowing rivers and streamlets seem typical of the ceaseless flow of charity that never runs dry in Ireland; the great river flows on always, deep and broad, fed by innumerable rivulets that trickle forth, sparkling and bright, from the hearts of rich and poor, but mostly, from those of the poor.

M.B.

COUNTY NEWS

CARLOW—A Golden Jubilee

In the Presentation Convent, Carlow, on the Feast of St. Cecilia, Mother Mary Cecilia Whyte celebrated the golden jubilee of her profession. Most Rev. Dr. Foley, Right Rev. Mgr. Murphy, Maryboro', Right Rev. Mgr. Burke, Bagnalstown, and several local clergymen attended the ceremonies. Since Mother Mary Cecilia, who is a Dublin lady, entered religion half a century ago, four Bishops have ruled over the diocese, of Kildare and Leighlin.

J. O'ROURKE,

First-class OUTFITTER, HATTER & MERCER, STAFFORD STREET, TIMARU.
All Goods direct from Manufacturer to Customer. Finest Stock in South Canterbury. Up to-date.
Tailoring in charge of a First-rate Cutter. Prices Strictly Moderate.