

Irish News

OUR IRISH LETTER

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, January, 1907.

What truth there is in all our sayings! Our winter, up to Christmas, was so mild that summer costumes were everywhere to be seen, not only on young shoulders not crowned by wise heads, but on mature boys and girls of an age one would suppose to be endowed with some prudence. Still, everyone remarked the unusual quantities of red berries to be seen, especially on the holly, a sign of a hard winter, and, sure enough, after Christmas there suddenly came snow storms such as are rarely seen in a generation in this temperate climate. And with snow wreaths came cruel suffering for man and beast. In midland, western and northern country districts, the drifts lay high, and news has come of deaths from cold and exposure, and heavy losses to farmers whose flocks got caught in mountain hollows.

The Sufferings of the Poor.

Yet I doubt if the worst sufferings our poor have to endure in the country can in any way compare with the miseries of poverty in a city. Poverty in the country pinches and grinds, and is hard to bear, but the very poorest, most tumble-down cabin by roadside or bog is not to be compared in misery with the loathsome garrets or cellars of the poorest class in large towns, where the inhabitants are mostly strangers to each other; where a breath of pure air never blows, spring, summer, autumn, or winter; where loneliness adds its sting so often to every other ill, or where there is company compared to which the loneliness of a desert would be preferable. Away out in the country the poor have, at all events, pure air on every side, pure companionship, kind neighbors who will share the last meal and the last sod of turf; who will all do their best for each other, will even beg for each other when all else fails. And then, when the snow and frost melt away the sun shines out over God's own country? 'Oh! no: then poverty, looking out over moor and meadow, hill and dale, river and rill and blue sky, is almost as far removed from the same lack of riches in the squalid city slum as is Heaven from earth.

Christmas, the Christmas of the poor, reminds us of the extraordinary amount of charity done in our little metropolis. You could not realise all that is then done by busy hands and kind hearts to help the city neighbor in that season of holy charity when all who are blest with even a moderate share of worldly wealth invariably recollect that 'tis time to remember the poor,' as the old song says. The charity dispensed is enormous and far-reaching, but still, it cannot give to all, can, at best, but give a brief pleasure, must leave thousands untouched, alone, cold and starving within a stone's throw of plenty.

A Charitable Institution.

In one of the poorest districts of Dublin, the Sisters of Mercy preside over a Night Refuge for utterly destitute women and children. A refuge to which hundreds, who have not even the price of a lodging, go nightly for food, warmth, and shelter. A good character and utter destitution are the only recommendations necessary to gain admittance each night to this home of the homeless, and strange is the medley that is seen around that fireside and that supper table in Brickfield Lane.

Not a romantic, not even a sympathetic-sounding name is Brickfield Lane, yet what tragic stories lie in the hearts of those shivering guests, what sorrows are nightly sobbed out on those humble pillows! There is scarce a misery in all the world that appeals to us more than the woe of a poor woman, a little child, wandering aimlessly about the cold, storm-swept streets at night, not a spot to turn to, a hand to hold, a word from any mortal to lighten the terrors of dark, desolate night.

That there are many in this plight, the weekly record of the Night Refuge shows. This record is published weekly, in a quiet, business-like way, by the Sisters of Mercy, and is as eloquent an appeal to the charitable as any thrilling address from the most gift-

ed orator; governesses, (so many), ladies without fixed occupation (so many), dressmakers (so many), seamstresses, servants, charwomen, children; a big total every week, and all received each evening, fed, warmed, allowed a social chat, where hearts are not too heavy, given a warm, clean bed and, if funds allow, breakfast in the morning before setting out once more on the weary search for something to do.

Christmas, then, is duly celebrated with warm love in the Night Refuge, a day refuge, too, on that occasion, and it is a very touching thing to witness the delicate gratitude with which these poor women, the very poorest of the poor, do all in their power to be joyous that their kind hosts may feel that they are not working for the thankless, each one striving to forget that to-morrow there may be no food and no warmth from the hour they leave that shelter in the morning until the gates open again at night. Truly, there must be a special blessing sent down from Heaven to every citizen of Dublin who spares even a little help for the guests at the Night Refuge, Brickfield Lane.

Our Climate.

Ours is a curious climate. Summer flowers linger with us so fondly and flower culture is such a general taste that now, at Christmas, even while we keep to the use of the time-honored holly and ivy, we also have each year an ever-increasing profusion of home-grown natural flowers for houses and churches. The hideous artificial bouquets have disappeared, and true taste, is becoming a marked feature of church decoration, the prevailing adornment around the altars being palms, smilax, delicate ferns, and quantities of pure white blossoms—the most fitting of all. I have often read of your summer Christmas at the Antipodes, in the midst of warmth and flowers. Here, so far north, I had from my own sea-side garden on Christmas Day bouquets of scarlet geranium, jessamin, white chrysanthemums, laurestine, and trailers of passion flower. Not bad for a country as far north as St. Petersburg, yet where there is really very little winter weather such as is known even across the channel.

Expectations Not Realised.

Charles Dickens wrote a novel called 'Great Expectations.' We, in Ireland, are for ever beginning our new years with great expectations seldom realised. Were not hope a virtue, I should say we are an absurdly hopeful people, ever meeting with disappointments in the fading away of the charming political rainbows, so often painted for us on the political sky. The new year of 1906 brought a fresh rainbow in the shape of a new and professedly Home Rule Chief Secretary, Mr. Bryce, and up went hope once more. Mr. Bryce has, in one short year, accepted office elsewhere, and it would take a powerful magnifying glass to see what has really resulted from the year's work for Ireland's Ireland. His graceful farewell to the country was a lecture delivered by him (as a hearty Home Ruler), in the rooms of the National Literary Society, on the Danes! A very safe subject, seeing that the Danes have been dead and gone in Ireland these many centuries. We are told that Mr. Bryce's intentions, were good. Meanwhile, we still have Commissions, Commissions, Commissions on all subjects; otherwise not much change, if any, has been made towards giving a trial to Irish ideas in Ireland although, if we are to believe our Protestant neighbors, a Protestant cannot now get any situation whatever in the country. This is the cry now, steadily repeated since competitive examinations have thrown open a few of the smallest, the very smallest, posts to Catholics, in face of the undeniable fact that still the loaves and fishes are in the hands of the minority and that, in truth, no matter what is done to advance the education of Catholic youth, very few posts worth having can be obtained by them while the ever-increasing amalgamation of trades in large houses owned by public companies makes it yearly more difficult for a man to start in or become prosperous in business, in Dublin, especially.

M.B.

COUNTY NEWS

ANTRIM—A Belfast Editor

Mr. Campbell, M.A., B.L., has been presented by his numerous friends in Belfast with an illuminated address, a valuable gold watch, a dressing-case, and a travelling-bag, in appreciation of his editorship of the 'Irish News' for the past eleven years.

J. O'ROURKE,

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