

Irish News

OUR IRISH LETTER

(From our own correspondent.)

DUBLIN, October, 1908.

In my last letter I told of my holiday in the country, and that among the visitors at the house I was visiting were a lady and her three children from far-off New Zealand. The lady, whose whole life had been spent in New Zealand, had much to say about that land. I was glad to hear her speak most kindly—almost affectionately—of the Natives, for my sympathies are always with the original owners of a country. There were one or two books given me to look over, but they were mostly compiled by or in the interests of the Protestant Missionary Societies, and were too dry; the little thrown in about plants, scenery, etc., was bone-dry, and details as to the Natives were not very kindly; in fact, I did not read far. I wonder have the Maoris any literature on the subject of the Whites. Their views might sometimes surprise us.

Anyhow, our New Zealanders did not abuse the Maoris, and I liked them the better for it. Their delight, too, in our home life and scenes and easily-made happiness was refreshing, and they were quite satisfied with the beauty and grace of the swallows and the cosy prettiness of robin redbreast, though, being Presbyterians, they had never heard why robin's breast is always red. Neither had any of the party, for that matter, for, as a rule, we Catholics have all these pretty legends to ourselves, but I told the children how it was that, when Our Lord hung on the cross, a little robin nestled close to His shoulder, singing, to try and console Him. The ever-grateful Saviour, the Creator and lover of even the little birds, leaned His head towards His loving creature, and a drop of blood from a wound made by the crown of thorns fell upon the bird's breast, which has ever since been crimson, in memory of his act of pity for his dying Maker. This, too, is why the robin is a sacred bird with our Irish boys.

A Drive in the Country.

On fine afternoons—sometimes even on wet days—we had out the trap and bicycles and rode miles around the lovely roads, visited one or other of the towns six miles off, where we put up the horse and iron steeds and inspected every other shop in the place, always bringing home sweets with which to enliven the evening hour around the big work table. Or we drove to afternoon tea at some country house, where, perhaps, we fell in for a sewing circle gathered under the trees, tongues going as busily as needles, the talk quite as intellectual and pleasant, to say the very least, as city conversation at social functions, the occupation helping wonderfully to put all at their ease. Then home in high glee, all of us looking out for white horses for certain two of the party supposed not to be averse to matrimony. This is said to be a sure recipe. Begin counting the white horses you see while out on your daily travels, and then, when you have reached 100, look out, and be very careful. The first single man you shake hands with is your fate.

Home through our hamlet; a single row of neat cottages, all ablaze with flowers, on the houses, in the houses, and in the tiny model gardens; a post office (blessed institution in the country!), and one real shop. The mail sorted, the horse whipped up, and before long a genuine country tea bid the party welcome: cold meat or game, scones, cream, fruit, honey, eggs, home-made jam, and bread, and general good humor. What more could mortal desire? Tea would be followed by a good walk, all hatless and coatless, around fields, up hills, to the fox covert—but never a fox could be seen; round the mushroom fields, in search of dainties for breakfast, the old as eager as the young; wild chases after the villain, Rescue, to save his invariable prey, an unfortunate hedgehog; back in the dusk to lights, music, needlework, and gay gossip, then to bed.

Such is life in the country in old Ireland still. Is it not a home-like picture? How true it is that man makes cities, but God Himself makes the lovely country.

But autumn shades came closing in, all too soon. The swallows gathered, settled their travelling route, and flew away to the warm east, and the homing swallows must fly too, scattering like the autumn leaves. Reluctantly I turned my back on kind acquaintances, on blackberrings, russet tints, and fading flowers, and came back to learn that in place of cooing of wood pigeons there were rumors of sad war in the air. That while I was peacefully shelling peas, helping to count white horses, learning the latest crochet patterns from New Zealand, tenderly carrying

wounded hedgehogs to safe retreats, so many things had happened that I felt dazed when trying to catch up once again with the world.

Local Exhibition.

I found that a highly interesting and successful exhibition of purely Irish products and industries had been held in Galway, the ancient 'City of the Tribes.' This exhibition had been promoted in order to obtain a wider market for home products, and those who visited it say that it was an extremely good show. Connemara marbles shone; lead and silver ore from Galway mines were to be seen; Donegal and Galway looms were at work, turning out the once more famous Irish tweeds, cloths, blankets, and so on; the Irish Fisheries Department showed what wealth might, and, in fact, does flow in with every tide. The Arran Islands sent, among other things, products of the women's industry in spinning and knitting, a number of girls working at the woollen wheels, while men made the curious 'pampooties,' or cowhide sandals worn on the islands, where such shoes are necessary for the constant clambering over the rocks of which almost the entire area of these islands is composed, the bits of land that shine like oases in the desert of stone being entirely the work of generations of natives who carried sand and seaweed, creel by creel, on their backs from the shore, made lime, made the earth, in fact, and were then made to pay rent for it, over £3000 a year being exacted from these fishermen.

Irish Industries.

At the Galway Exhibition there was held a conference of merchants and manufacturers to devise the best means of responding to a circular from America, in which it is proposed that—'In order that the American people may have an opportunity to become more familiar with the products of Irish manufacture, it is proposed to establish in the city of New York a depot for the sale and distribution of Irish goods exclusively. Special and particular attention will be given to the introduction to the American market of Irish poplins, damasks, woollens, linens, laces, and other articles of Irish manufacture, and to securing in part the trade which now goes to England and other foreign countries.'

Religious Activity.

During this last quarter, Irish Catholics have been very active in that glorious work so dear to Our Lord, the Association of the Propagation of the Faith. In addition to Ireland's other countless works of charity, she contributed, within the last three months, no less than £963 16s to teaching all nations. Where does the money come from?

The British Association.

In September the annual assembly of the British Association was held in Dublin, where learned people, male and female, were to be met with at every turn, and citizens vied with each other in hospitality to the stars, their uncles, their cousins, and their aunts, who seemed greatly to enjoy the pleasant receptions at the Viceregal Lodge, Trinity College, Loreto Abbey Convent, and elsewhere, as well as the charming scenery that is within easy reach of Dublin on every side. Garden parties and evening receptions and gay picnics agreeably varied the heavy work of meetings at which questions of vast importance to the whole wide world were discussed. Many who are not exactly learned people but who like to be near the rose, and, perhaps too, to be included in invitations to the Viceregal Lodge, had the privilege of joining the British Association for the session for a moderate consideration, and were supremely happy in being thus associated, one, as it were, with the learned folk without having the bother of passing stiff examinations in anything. I myself should have liked vastly well to have joined on these easy terms, but I was busy shelling peas at the time.

Old Age Pensions.

On January 1, 1909, such of our poor old men, and women as have managed to struggle on to seventy and who have not been in receipt of out-door relief for twelve months will be in receipt of an old age pension. What a happy day that will be for many! The lucky ones will instantly begin to grow young again, and long life to them!

Poverty seems good for longevity, and a proof of the truth of the medical men's axiom that it is better to eat too little than too much is that the number of septuagenarians in Ireland is, approximately, far in excess of the numbers in England and Scotland: it is expected that from Ireland there will be no fewer than 187,314. It is a touching thought, too, that this high figure shows how affectionate our poor are towards their aged relatives; what struggles must be made to keep the old father and mother at home do these numbers represent, what self-