

Irish News.

OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, November, 1900.

A REAL BURNING QUESTION.

And now, seeing that the Tories are in again as strong as before, and we can't help it—the war did it—what is the burning question of the hour? Not the General Elections, the continuance of the war in South Africa or the war in China; not the relative merits of Bryan or McKinlay; not Sir Thomas Lipton's new yacht, Shamrock No. 2, which is once more to compete for supremacy over American yachts; not that three more 'largest steamships in the world' are being built at Belfast by Messrs Harland and Wolff for the White Star Line; not even the announcement that the Prince and Princess of Wales intend visiting Belfast in February No, the burning question with all, rich and poor, householders, manufacturers, steamship companies and governments, from the Bog of Allen to the Bosphorus, is the price of coals. Never were so much coals required, and never before were they so dear for any lengthened period as they have been for the last year, owing principally to strikes amongst miners and to the scarcity of labor on account of the numbers of men sent out to the African war from the mines and railways. It is an old saying, that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. The question of cheap fuel has set men to work in order to solve the long-sought-after problem of how to compress the peat of the vast areas of Irish bog so as to make the stuff something nearer to the bulk of the peat of other days, coal. As the Irish peasant uses what may be called the raw material, the product of the bogs called 'turf' is too bulky and too rapidly consumed to be of any real use in extensive manufacture; but as peat, or turf, contains all the properties that have been condensed in coal by time and the pressure of the earth above it, scientific men have long puzzled over the effort to hit upon some means of taking time by the forelock and hastening the process of time, so as to turn our great peat surface into coal mines for present use. So far success is only partial: a fuel vastly more dense, or compact, than the old-fashioned turf is being turned out in large quantities in the County Sligo, and as fast as it can be manufactured it is purchased by local, and even by foreign, firms, so that a large trade will be done during the year in this class of Irish product, the material for which exists in enormous quantities in almost every county of Ireland.

In olden times even the gentry used turf fires, and a very pleasant and a very clean fire it gave. A few years ago I went through the old mansion of Edgeworthstown, the home of the celebrated writer, Maria Edgeworth. On each landing, outside the bedroom doors, I saw still preserved immense turf bins of solid mahogany bound with wide bands of brass, like our ancient plate buckets, now so much sought after by collectors of antique furniture.

MOVING BOGS.

These bogs, though health-giving, are not always agreeable neighbors. Last month, there was a serious bog-slip in Clare by which a young girl lost her life, her house being overwhelmed by the floating stuff which, when these slips occur, flows over the country like an eruption of lava from a volcano, burying every thing in its progress, until it falls into and fills some deep valley. A few years ago, there was an appalling catastrophe of the kind at Killarney. This time two or three families lost their cattle and hay, are, in fact, ruined, and an appeal is being made to the charity of the public for them. Representations were made to the Government by Mr. Wm. Redmond, M.P., who besought aid for the poor people in their dire distress, but not a penny would be given them—all the money is wanted for the war.

These moving bogs are not uncommon. They usually occur after a wet season, when the water that always underlies a large tract of such land becomes swollen, tears away the tree roots and other ligatures that bind the bog bottom to the solid stratum beneath, and then the already semi-liquid stuff swells and loosens with the increased moisture, bursts its bonds, rises from its ordinary level and flows over the nearest incline, carrying with it trees, houses, cattle, every obstacle.

A DEARTH OF GOOD SINGERS.

The death of Sims Reeves, the tenor who delighted three generations, has set people thinking over a question that has often puzzled me of late years: what has happened to the human voice? It is an undoubted fact that we never now hear such exquisite singers as those of a generation ago. Twenty-five years ago, there were Titiens, Trebelli, Albani, Patti, and a host of singers, male and female, all contemporaries and all not only better artists than any we hear now, but endowed with qualities of voice such as no present-day singer possesses. And our fathers talked of Malibran, Grisi, Mario, Jenny Lind, Lablache. Of a certainty, something has gone wrong with the human voice. What singer ever makes one weep now? Not one.

IRISH WIT

Sims Reeves' death has also set old folks telling stories, and, of course, some playgoer of Dublin's old Royal has a good anecdote to tell of Irish wit apropos of Sims Reeves, who was to have sung one night—say 10 years ago—at the Royal, but had a royal row with the then manager, and declined to appear, although he took his place in a box as one of the audience. His substitute proved unequal to the part assigned him, broke down totally, and had to retire in the midst of an angry uproar from the audience. Calcroft, the manager, came before the curtain, white with fear, and said: 'Mr. Reeves is in the house, and could sing the part, if he would.' Reeves accordingly left his box, came upon the stage, and went

through the scene as he alone could do. When called before the curtain, he explained that he had sung to please the audience 'and not to please no Mr. Calcroft' (Reeves was of rather humble origin, and his grammar was not perfect). 'Well,' ejaculated one of the scene-shifters in the wings, 'if your voice is tenor, your grammar is base.'

An almost equally good story comes from South Africa, and is reminiscent of the terrible night marches the unfortunate Irish Fusiliers were often forced through. One night the men were stumbling over a boulder-strewn veldt, when a poor Dublin private asked his officer where they were 'at all at all.' 'On the Nichtsfontein table-land, my man,' was the answer. 'Oh, then, begor!' remarked Tim, 'I'm thinking the table is turned upside down, and it's over the legs of it we're walking.'

CONCERT BY BLIND MUSICIANS.

I listened with real pleasure the other night to the singing of a poor blind girl from Australia. She was one of some 80 blind musicians from the Merriion Asylum, under the Sisters of Charity. These sightless girls give concerts each year to help towards their own support, for the State gives but a pittance towards the maintenance of those helpless girls, who, thanks to their patient teachers, are wonderfully accomplished artists, considering their state of life and their great privation. It is truly a touching sight to watch them, and a genuine pleasure to listen to their music, about which there is a certain element of that refinement that marks the blind who are educated apart from the world and guarded from contact with all moral darkness, as these poor girls have the happiness to be.

THE CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY.

The Catholic Truth Society is proving a splendid success, and the avidity with which its booklets upon religious, historical, and even archeological subjects are bought up goes far to raise the hope that the aims of this Society will be realised and good and instructive reading rapidly take the place with the Catholics of Ireland of the cheap and poisonous trash that is poured into the country from England. In a few months, over a hundred thousand booklets by our best and most learned writers have been purchased, and we hear on all sides the delighted encomiums of working men and women on historical tracts from such men as Cardinal Moran, Bishop Healy, and others. In fact, our people are passionately fond of historical reading, but were heretofore in a great measure debarred from indulging in the study of well written histories by the costliness of such books, so that the publication of these cheap tracts, is really not alone a Christian, but is also a patriotic, work which cannot but lead to most useful results amongst the young, who were fast being denationalised by the school-books put into their hands, even in our Convent schools.

BAD LITERATURE.

The Pastoral of the Bishops of Ireland, issued at the close of the late General Synod of Maynooth, dealt very strongly with the subject of the present-day love of loose reading, the effects of which are clearly perceptible in the general tone of society, even in Ireland, where it is regrettable to see young and old greedily devouring every immoral novel that is the fashion of the hour and crowding to witness plays unfit for Christian men or women to hear or see. Such is the sad result of the gradual denationalisation that has been going on in every grade of society, and that has been caused principally by the deliberate plan of Government, aided by the false spirit of vulgar desire amongst our *nouveaux riches* to be considered stylish and to forget that they are Irish, little knowing, in their ignorance of what is truly high and noble that every step taken towards denationalising their children but sinks them lower in the eyes of those whose vices they copy. However, I must not forget to remark that if the Prelates found it necessary to raise their warning voices against certain great danger, of our times, they were also able to record their conviction that the general morality and fidelity to the practice of their religion of the people at large are even higher than in former times, and that drunkenness is, on the whole, on the decrease.

THE IRISH PILGRIMAGE.

A large body of pilgrims from Ireland went to Rome lately to celebrate the Holy Year. They have just returned, delighted with the cordial reception and marked kindness of the Holy Father, who granted to his children from—as he said—'Ireland, Ireland, dear Ireland,' the special favor of a private audience, and subsequently a place of honor near his person during a public audience given to pilgrims from various nations.

M. B.

COUNTY NEWS.

ARMAGH.—Orange Rowdism at Portadown.—That the savage assaults perpetrated on the unoffensive Catholics of Portadown (writes the correspondent of a Belfast paper) on the occasion of their excursion to Bundoran, and the farcical prosecutions and nominal penalties and fewness of those brought to the mock justice might have satisfied the frolicsome Orange lams, at least for a time. But such a result could not be tolerated by the innocents of the Edenderry portion of the 'town on the Bann.' Since then, the only Catholic residents have been subjected to every sort of annoyance with the view of chasing them from the district, by breaking their windows, bursting open their doors, and throwing mud, etc., at and into their houses. The present state of affairs is intolerable, and the Catholics of that part of the town are in a state of dread and terror, although they have some confidence latterly in the way police work is being attended to. But they forcibly feel the want of security they had while the police barrack was in that part of the town, and are satisfied that until a police station is again established in it there will be repetitions of such ruffianly conduct as has disgraced that part of the town for the past year.