

Irish News.

OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, January, 1901.

THE NEW CENTURY.

I WELL remember my sensations of blank disappointment when, as a very youthful individual, I first went on the Continent and found men, and women and children who looked precisely like those I had left behind me in Ireland. My one comfort was in the sabots, the queerly-shaped pantaloons and other odd-looking articles of dress worn by the humble classes.

I own to something of the same feeling of disappointment at entering upon a new century without experiencing the slightest indication, not the least little jolt of any kind to remind us we were crossing the threshold. No one looks older, sadder, wiser, for entering on his second century: the last century infants are infants still! My old friend down the road, who was born in the County Wexford in the last year of the eighteenth century and has consequently lived in three centuries, is as brisk and lively as she has been any day these many years, and I could see no change in her as she stood this morning at her hall door, looking sharply after the doing up of her front garden for the coming spring, while her 'little maid' (a mere chit of a thing of 75 or 76!) was trotting down the road or a message. It's too bad: it is, so it is! as the little boys of the last century used to say; nothing to mark in men, minds, or manners, in nature, animate or inanimate, the entry upon a new era, unless, indeed, what I am trying to persuade myself be true: that the days this January are lengthening much more rapidly than ever they did in any January I have known before, and that never in the past century did the thrushes sing so continuously as in this, the first month of the new era. Perhaps the days and the thrushes have felt something. Who knows?

I think there are hopeful times ahead, too, for our dear land. The New Year was ushered in with a great midnight religious solemnity throughout the country, and not a disorderly voice was raised, not a drunkard was there to desecrate that solemn hour; not one single act of theft from the hundreds of thousands of deserted houses has been reported from any part of Ireland, though entire households, every human being who could do so, were present at the Midnight Mass and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, invoking a blessing on their country, their families and homes, as their first act of the new century. How could so many fervent prayers but be an earnest for the future, and the first good news we have is that, notwithstanding all the outcry against us, the official statistics prove beyond yea or nay that drunkenness is much less prevalent than formerly, and that Ireland has five nations, including England and Scotland, far ahead of her in the matter of consumption of intoxicating drink. I have lived for months at a time in almost every one of the 32 counties of Ireland and have observed the people pretty closely, and I can vouch for the fact that the peasantry all over the country are, as a rule, a most sober people, and even in our large cities drunkenness is chiefly confined to two classes: the very poor, whose miserable surroundings but too often lead them into the temptation of the bright, warm drink shops; and that class for whom there is no excuse, no pity—the men, especially the young men, of the richer classes, many of whom are those worst and most irreclaimable of all drinkers, confirmed tipplers. I often think society is much to blame for this increasing habit amongst youths of good social position. Were it made as great a disgrace for a young gentleman to be seen coming out of a dram shop as it would be for his sister; were mothers and young girls less delicate about letting youths know that they were aware of these degrading habits, and would they but refuse all intimacy with men who indulged in them, I do think young lads would oftener resist the vile temptation, and there would be fewer men requiring stimulants all day long.

A NEW DISCOVERY.

No doubt it is the well-known habit of mind of the Irish race, the constant habit we Irish Catholics contract, even in childhood, of thinking of death as it should be thought of, that has prevented the new American cure for old age from finding its way into this country. There was an old song long ago that began 'Bid the old grow young again,' but we see so many wonders in these days of electricity, wireless telegraphy, dead men's voices bottled up, and so on, that our next door neighbors in America do not see why the old should not grow young again and declare they have found the elixir of life, and that more than one aged American has actually proved its efficacy, while thousands are literally living in pickle, inside and out, for the elixir is nothing more nor less than salt, salt in any and every form. So if you New Zealanders can only find out how much to use and when to stop (here lies the critical point), why—there you are, for ages to come. We live quite long enough for our own comfort, here in Ireland, and don't want to cease our beautiful old prayer 'The light of Heaven to us!' So we are not going to try and live longer than our allotted span.

A RELIC OF THE PENAL TIMES.

One of the New Year's gifts has been the intimation that Ireland must find some 15 millions of the cost of the South African war. That is, about £3 15s for every man, woman, and child in the country. Where is this to come from, in addition to all the other taxes. I sometimes think that the Irish are connoisseurs of coin, for, with all the poverty of the country, which is suffering sorely from over-taxation and from the ruin to farmers and manufacturers caused by free trade, the people are for ever pouring out money for religious and charitable works as freely as if they were a

nation of millionaires. Witness the innumerable fine churches that have sprung up, almost in every village, not to mention the magnificent edifices that now adorn every town and city, all built since Catholic Emancipation. There are old people still living who tell why a church on one of the Quays of Dublin was first called by the curious name by which it is still so generally known that, at this moment, I cannot recall the real Patron of 'Adam and Eve's Church.'

In the beginning of the 19th century, just closed, Catholics were barely tolerated in Dublin, and such a thing as a church in any prominent position dare not be thought of: in fact, Catholics still practically worshipped in secret, and one of their 'Mass Houses' was a room to the rear of a public house owned by a Catholic and known by the name of 'Adam and Eve's Public.' The entrance to this bar was through a narrow court, the room used as a church being reached through this court and bar, so that Catholics who were going to Mass, if questioned by any suspicious-looking inquirer, invariably answered 'I am going to Adam and Eve's.' A spacious church has long succeeded the bar and the poor 'Mass House,' but still any stranger who asks what Church that is, invariably receives the answer 'Adam and Eve's.'

CHURCH BUILDING.

Yes, the beauty of the Lord's House and the place where His Glory dwelleth are very dear to the Irish Catholic's heart. In the old southern 'Faire Cille' of Kilkenny, there is a beautiful Gothic church which was lately built entirely at the cost of one family, farmers who made a fortune in Australia, returned to the old home and spent £30,000 of that fortune in erecting a temple to the Most High. Last summer, being in Belfast, I was told to be sure and go and see the Church of the Holy Rosary, an exquisitely tasteful building upon which a policeman named Michael Little, who some time ago inherited a considerable fortune, is spending a large part of that inheritance, the remainder of which he spends upon other religious and charitable works, while he himself is content to remain a poor man, living simply upon his small pension as ex-policeman.

Meath is that fertile part of Ireland that was devastated of human beings after the famine years, in order to make its plains into vast cattle ranches. Meath, in which is situate historic Tara, has been almost the last important diocese without its Cathedral, for the poor were driven into exile, and it is the poor who build Cathedrals in Ireland. The other day, the Bishop called his Catholic flock together and asked them to erect a Cathedral worthy of that once famous part of the land that was for centuries the chief monarchical residence of Ireland. At the very first meeting, £15,000 were subscribed! As for charity to the poor, those who know anything of its ceaseless flow cannot but see that the Hand of God Himself must be source of so miraculous a stream.

AN UNKNOWN LANGUAGE.

With the opening of the new century has come a fresh impetus to the movement for reviving the Irish language, and now every town, every village, every hamlet has its Irish class. Through the instrumentality of his Grace of Dublin, himself an Irish scholar, the National School curriculum now includes the teaching of the native tongue, and in large cities almost every ward has one or more classes, many attended by several hundred pupils, so that what 20 years ago was looked upon by most people as a foolish dream, now promises to become a reality; our nation once again using that beautiful language that contains more blessings and sweeter and more endearing terms in its everyday speech than any other in the whole world. As there are still over a quarter of a million of Irish-speaking people in the four provinces it is easy to obtain teachers who can give the correct pronunciation, so that the present hearty eagerness of old and young to be learners makes those interested in the movement very hopeful of success.

I can't resist telling you a story about a corner of Ireland that was so thoroughly 'planted' by strangers that the Gaelic tongue utterly disappeared, namely Wexford.

A lady from the town of Wexford was spending an evening with me a short time, ago just after the general elections. It does not matter what her politics are exactly: they are very strong. She is truly of an ancient Irish race, but a word of Gaelic she does not know. She was eagerly telling of the defeat of a candidate for Parliamentary honors, a gentleman who had come home from India, purchased a residence in Wexford, and renamed the house after some of his Hindoo places, forsooth. No less than 'Bean Aboo!' But the people would have nothing to do with him. Whenever he attempted to speak or wherever he appeared they shouted him down with 'B-o-o! Go back to your outlandish, heathen Bean Aboo!'

'What's the matter?' suddenly asked my friend, seeing that I could no longer control a fit of laughter. 'Why,' I asked, 'how do you know that the name he gave his place was not a delicate compliment to your own self? At all events, it was a true Irish compliment to the fair sex of Wexford in general, for 'bean aboo' is the Irish equivalent for 'woman for ever.'

M. B.

COUNTY NEWS.

CORK—A Big Commercial Transaction.—Messrs. J. J. Murphy, the well-known Cork brewers, have taken over the extensive breweries in Cork lately worked by John A. Arnott and Company. The purchase price is said to be £95,000.

The Mayor Pays His Respects to the Bishop.—On Friday, January 25, the new Lord Mayor of Cork, Alderman Fitzgerald, accompanied by Aldermen William Phair and M. J. O'Riordan, Councillors Aherne, A. M. Cole, H. O'Shea, and the Lord Mayor's Secretary, Mr. D. F. Giltinan, proceeded in open carriages to the Palace, Farranferries, to pay the customary official visit to the