

Irish News.

OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From our own correspondent)

Dublin, January, 1902
The Drink Evil.

There is no denying the fact that in England, Ireland, and Scotland, at least, drinking and gambling are making sad havoc amongst all classes. To say that the Irish are the greatest drunkards of the three countries is utterly untrue. Statistics issued by Government each year prove incontestably that there is far less money, per head, spent in intoxicating liquors in this country than in any of the three parts of the Kingdom, and that there is infinitely less crime in Ireland than in England, Scotland, or Wales. But this is little comfort, so long as there is so much misery brought about daily by drinking habits and by gambling, which latter vice seems now to enter into the life of nine-tenths of the male population, rich or poor.

A new law has just come into operation, by which it is made criminal, for parents to employ as messengers to public bars, or for publicans to serve children under 14 with drink in unsealed vessels; a law which should materially assist those who work in the noble cause of temperance, for the custom of sending children to bars to fetch beer or whisky was a terrible temptation to the young, who so often inherit a craving for stimulants. One fact will show how valuable to the licensed trade the sale to children was: it was customary at many bars in England to have stands at the counters high enough to enable even little children of three or four years of age to reach the counters and to supply sweets to them as a means of making the unfortunate little creatures long to return to places they should naturally dread, knowing so well, as the very youngest do, that the oftener beer or whisky is brought from the public house to the home, the greater will be their own sufferings and misery. Simultaneously with the promulgation of this new law—which was, in truth, wrong from an unwilling Government—our bishops and priests are exerting themselves to the utmost in the cause of temperance, and have succeeded in more than one district in inducing the local magistrates to take a step that would prove highly beneficial if universally carried out: the refusal to grant any new license in their district until three old licences shall have dropped. The makers and sellers of intoxicating liquors, from Lord Ardilaun down, are the wealthiest part of the community: as a rule they are unscrupulous as regards everything that conduces to the prosperity of their trade. Then there is the law known as 'The Bona Fide Travelers Act,' which simply means that there is simply no such thing as closed bars in the principal cities and their suburbs on Sundays, the workman's free day. A man has but to take a three mile train drive or ride a like distance on a tram, or pretend he has done so, and he can drink as he likes; public houses and hotels are at every corner, open and tempting, so that the wonder is, not that we have so much drunkenness in Ireland, but that, thank God, there is so much sobriety and so little crime. Every temptation that can be held out to our men and women to become drunkards is held out to them, for the taxes are more urgently needed every day, money must be found, and nothing brings such a contribution to the Imperial Treasury as the intoxicating liquors tax, so no wonder that there is excess in drinking, in spite of all efforts made by those who have the moral welfare of the people at heart.

An Incentive to Drink.

Some time ago, when opening a new Temperance Hall for boys, Mr. John Dillon, M.P., dwelt at length on the wonderful work, the miraculous work, achieved in pre-famine days, by Father Mathew, when three millions of people took the pledge from the apostle's own hands, and intemperance practically vanished from the land. But Mr. Dillon forgot to dwell upon certain facts that occurred during those famine years, when the people were weak and worn out from the awful privations that sent nearly half of the Irish of those days to the grave. He forgot, in speaking of the partial relapse back into drunken habits, to tell how, when at last relief works were established throughout the country and employment given to the starving people, the Government drew into the Treasury their quota of every shilling that had been subscribed by public charity. They granted licences allowing public houses to be established beside or in every pay office throughout Ireland, so that when the hungry men received their small wages—for which many had walked, fasting, 10, 12, 14 miles—there at hand was the cheap whisky, tempting them to warm their poor hearts and bodies, so weak and famished that it was next to an impossibility they should be able to resist what was placed before their eyes. Thus began the partial, but only partial, falling away from Father Mathew's blessing to Ireland, and so it has continued: licences granted out of all proportion to the public wants or wishes. Let us hope that a strict watch will be kept now upon child messengers by those interested in the real welfare of the country. It is difficult to win back the drunkard, but at least much might be done in the way of prevention, and one excellent rule has been in operation for several years in various Catholic dioceses: all boys and girls preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation are, if possible, induced to take the total abstinence pledge until the age of twenty-one.

Yet while there is a certain amount of misery in this country to be ascribed to drink, what Ireland would be but for its baneful effects may be imagined when we learn that in spite of the fact that the laws are far more rigidly enforced here than in England, it has been found necessary within the last three months to close no less than six county gaols on account of the total absence of crime in the districts to which these gaols belonged. Here, surely, is a circumstance worth recording.

And yet the Coercion Act has been revived, simply because men do what the very greatest lawyers say they have a legal right to do: combine, for their own mutual benefit and protection, in order to obtain the passing of an Act of Parliament for compulsory sale of agricultural estates to the occupying tenants, a movement into which Mr. T. W. Russell, M.P., has thrown himself heart and soul, though he is a Unionist and a former member of the Cabinet.

The Land Question.

The following was asked in Parliament on the night of the 27th inst.: Whether the Chief Secretary for Ireland is aware that 'a number of land agents (rent collectors) in Ireland have formed a society for the purpose of preventing the Land Purchase clauses of the various Land Acts becoming operative, and for the protection of their own vested interests, and that an estate has been sold in the County Cavan by a landlord (Lord Morley) to a syndicate of land agents, some of whom are members of this association, for £23,000, although the tenants offered him £30,000 for it; and will a clause be inserted in the Bill referred to in the King's speech for

facilitating the sale of land in Ireland, giving the tenants in occupation the right of pre-emption when a landlord wishes to sell his estate, such as a landlord at present enjoys under the Land Act of 1881, when a tenant wishes to sell his interest in the farm.'

The above question refers to the sale of Lord Morley's estate which, it is affirmed, took place under the circumstances mentioned.

It is announced that the tenants on a considerable property in Mayo, the O'Grady estate, have arranged with their landlord for the purchase of their holdings on the same terms as those on which the Dillon tenants purchased some time ago, namely, 17½ years purchase. Taking into consideration the possibilities of land at the present day, this is considered a fair price by those who really understand such matters.

Since the opening of Parliament, the Irish landlords have declared that they will fight to the last, unless Government is willing to give them 27 years purchase, or a sum of money equal to 3½ per cent. on their own computation of the full value of land to them; that is, not allowing anything whatsoever out of the full rents charged the tenants except the bare cost of collecting those rents. In view of the yearly increasing depreciation in the value of produce from land, this is an impossible sum for the farmer to pay, so the landlords' ultimatum, as it now stands, means no surrender.

This is the time of year when bank directors meet their shareholders and place before them reports from which the public can draw a very fair idea of the general financial condition of the country. Reports have just been issued by the National Bank of Ireland, the Provincial Bank of Ireland, the Hibernian Bank, and others, as well as by the various railway companies, and the deduction to be drawn from these reports is that the past year has been a very bad one for an agricultural country: less land has been under cultivation for food products; a dry summer caused almost a hay famine; the prices of cattle and sheep have fallen, and, in fact, free trade is causing heavy reductions in the all-round profits of town and country a bad state of things in face of war estimates, and a sad look-out for our small farmers in view of the Irish landlords' ultimatum, which, however, men who profess to know both classes well, say must be and will be considerably modified in a year or so.

Experts.

I have more than once made very disrespectful remarks upon those 'Experts' (with a very capital E), so many of whom flood this afflicted land, draw large salaries out of the taxes, and earn their money by constantly declaiming in public and in private about the crass ignorance of the Irish farmer and the wonders that are to ensue when the day comes that these ignorant, obstinate, obtuse farmers adopt their, the 'Experts', plans for making hay, at all events!

I am disrespectful to these 'experts' because I have known so many in private life and have heard such comical ideas put forth by men who have suddenly left a city and some employment eminently calculated not to make them judges of country matters. Let us say, a man has been a London-born manufacturer of paper bags. By some chance, he has interest and obtains a place under the Board of Agriculture for Ireland. Presto! He is an 'expert' in cattle, poultry, horses, farming in general. He goes along in a country district and sees haycocks in a meadow at the end of July. 'Here's the slipshod Irish farmer for you! He should have had that hay ricked six weeks ago! No wonder farmers can't pay their rent in this miserable country!' I