

Irish News.

OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, January, 1902.

Soldiers and Religious Objects.

It is a very old custom, dating from the early Christian times, for Catholic soldiers to bear upon their persons some religious object when they are going into battle, a custom that has not fallen into disuse in these present days, for I was told lately that one of our city priests, who has a great deal to do with the Dublin barracks, has to bless and distribute rosaries and scapulars to all the Catholic soldiers whose regiments are going from Dublin to the war. The men feel that, go where they will, there is ever something near their hearts, that reminds them of God and home, something, the sight of which recalls them often to prayer and reminds them of their duty to God when in the midst of temptation, something blessed, to go with them into the soldier's lonely, unconsecrated grave. Recently, a soldier on board ship was seen to be sobbing bitterly, as if with a presentiment that he was looking his last upon all he loved on earth, and, as the ship drew off and the land was fading from sight, the poor fellow took out his scapular and kissed them, all he now had of Ireland. The story reminded me of a book I value highly, both on account of its own history and on account of the little picture that is gummed loosely into the front, so that a few lines of the writing on the reverse may be read. The engraving represents the Annunciation, and the lines on the back tell that it was found by Lieutenant Waldron, of the Roscommon Light Company at Vinegar Hill during the rebellion of 1798.

The book itself has an equally interesting story. It is an original copy of a catechism compiled by Andrew Dunlevy, Director of the Irish Community at Paris, for the use of the descendants of the Wild Geese, that is, the members of the Irish Brigades, and it proves with what tenacity these exiles clung to their native language and kept it in daily use and taught it to their children, long after all those who settled abroad must have become familiar with the language of their adopted countries, for the compiler had the book printed in the Irish language and in Irish type in Paris in the year 1742, which goes far to show that the printing of Irish books must not have been so very rare in France in those times, for it would scarcely pay to have our special Irish type struck for the publication of one book alone.

The Royal Visit.

There is much speculation abroad as to whether or not the King and Queen will visit Ireland this spring. One day, positive assurances are given that a visit may be counted upon in April, then again, rumors are heard that their Majesties will have too many engagements for this year, at least. Business has been so slack, especially in the northern capital, that a Royal visit is naturally looked for to stir up trade somewhat. So far, nothing definite is really known, although some preparations have been made at the Vice-regal Lodge, Phoenix Park, where the King and Queen will stay if they do come over.

Death of Aubrey de Vere.

A genuine poet has just passed away in the person of Mr. Aubrey de Vere, whose works should be far better known to the Irish people than those of the many so-called poets of the day, for Aubrey de Vere's writings on Irish subjects are

pure, religious, and national in the best sense of the word; he gives us in smooth and refined language, and with beautiful imagery, the traditions of our holy religion and the best legends of ancient times. He is never pagan in his writings, never borders on the coarse, is never obscure, and is content to clothe his ideas in good grammar. He never, in fact, gives us page after page of 'unthink thoughts' poured forth in an incomprehensible dialect of distorted words, but he has given some sweet poetry to Ireland, poetry such as our people would love, were it placed in their hands. But, like Ruskin, Aubrey de Vere did not believe in cheap puffs, in what is called log-rolling; in his early days of authorship, books were not so cheap and consequently not so easily placed in the hands of the people, and in these latter days it is he who shouts loudest gets the best hearing for the moment, but when things right themselves and another generation can review in peace the works of the writers of the last century, when the wheat is separated from the chaff, there is little doubt but that Aubrey de Vere's poems will have a lasting place in Irish literature.

Mr. de Vere's home was the beautiful house and demesne of Curragh Chase, County Limerick, in the near neighborhood of those lovely spots, Adare and Foynes, the latter the home of Miss Charlotte Grace O'Brien, daughter of William Smith O'Brien, and herself no mean poet, as well as one who has done an incalculable amount of good for Irish emigrant girls. At Foynes, the Shannon is most picturesque; it flows right under the rocky eminence on which Miss O'Brien's home stands and in the centre of the flood is a small wooded island upon which Mr. Aubrey de Vere had a lodge, a veritable sylvan retreat, where he spent many of his summer hours.

Born in the Protestant religion, one of those men in whom religion is always a deep, sensible part of their being, Mr. de Vere began at an early age to study religious questions, with the result that he became a convinced and firm Catholic, having been received into the Church by the late Cardinal Manning. Although a sincere lover of his country, her history and her people, in the abstract, he was not able entirely to rid himself of early imbibed political prejudices, and was conservative in policy, but his family were never harsh or unjust in their dealings with their tenantry.

Wedding Presents.

It is strange to note how a fashion grows. Twenty or thirty years ago, people began to levy a general tax for wedding presents by having the gifts of relatives and near friends laid out for inspection in the bride's house, and gently hinting to all mere acquaintances that they would be quite welcome to come and have a look at all the lovely things that had been showered upon the bride-elect. Curiosity brought acquaintances, and, naturally, these did not like to go empty-handed; next came a long list of gifts, with the names of donors, published in society papers, and even sometimes communicated to non-society journals, and woe to even the poorest and most distant acquaintance who gave no contribution: never could he or she expect an invitation to wedding or subsequent gaities in the new household. The fashion has now reached the point of sending out invitations to representatives of the Press to come, see, and dilate upon the wedding presents in their respective journals, and even to inspect and report upon the bride's trousseau! And—will it be believed—not only have members of the staffs of society papers responded, but those also of respectable journals, as in the case of a recent fashionable Irish marriage, that of Lord Londonderry's daughter. It may interest

young lady readers to learn from these journalists that the trousseau was made in Ireland, and that Lady Helen Stewart possesses 15 dozen of everything in the way of underwear, while her costly presents number over 700, including diamond and sapphire ornaments from the King and Queen and other members of the Royal Family, a gorgeous parure of diamonds from her father, a dress of costly Irish lace from the ladies of Belfast, and enough watches, clocks, rings, lockets, and other toys to stock a jeweller's shop. The wedding attracted such public notice in London that the Church in Eaton Square was not only thronged to overflowing but an immense crowd filled the street to see the guests, among whom were several members of the Royal family.

Old Age.

Do people really live longer now than formerly as some assert to be the case? Certainly we hear of a great many attaining an advanced age at present. I live in a Dublin suburb, a little town in itself, of some 3000 inhabitants, its villas stretching up to a summit of a beautiful hill and along the shore of the bay. Here 90 is a common age: we have buried many over 90 within the past few years, and only three years ago an aged neighbor of 105 died, leaving behind her a sister over 100. Last week we lost two old friends on the same day, each in her 102nd year, each retaining her faculties unimpaired to the last, both active up to a few months ago. One belonged to the very humble class, a good Catholic, whom I never missed from her place in the Sodality of the Sacred Heart at First Mass until within the last six months. The second lived within a few doors of her and belonged to the Protestant gentry of the County Wexford: a bright, brisk, active woman, a noted wit in her early days, sharp of tongue and full of fun to the last. Many a time we coaxed her into singing for us, in a strong, almost manly voice, songs she herself composed in her youth, and in which she sharply satirised some of the gentry of her native county and then sang the same for those very gentry, amongst whom was the Dowager Lady Carew, who only predeceased her fellow-countrywoman by a few months, dying at the age of 104. Only about three weeks before our friend died, I paid her a visit and we laughed heartily over many a joke. 'A good laugh,' she would say, 'is worth a pound of beefsteak.' It was only about two years ago she could be persuaded to call in a local doctor, when her friends grew anxious about an attack of vertigo. I called soon after and she told me she liked the new man well enough but would take none of his physic. The interview between doctor and patient began thus: 'I will give Miss F's own words: "Before you begin now, Dr. B., I want to tell you a story. A doctor was called in once (I forget where) to prescribe for a patient suffering from some queer complaint. The medical man felt him all over. "Ha!" he says, "I think I have got to the root of the disease. There's a swelling here, just beside the region of the heart. We must reduce that swelling at once." "Pray don't reduce it too much, doctor," says the patient, "it's my pocket book. Now you understand, Dr. B.?" "On my honor I did," concluded the old lady, "and he laughed till you'd think he'd kill himself."

'We shall miss our bright friend, for, in truth, when aged people like her retain their faculties there are few such entertaining companions, and Miss F. had endless stories of old times and loved a good gossip over present days as heartily as a girl of 20, taking an interest in dress and fashion and needlework, in the latter of which she excelled, while her potato cake was something to be thankful for, for she kept up her housekeeping to the last.