

Irish News.

OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)
Dublin, June 3, 1902.

No words can express the general relief and thankfulness at the announcement of peace: the certainty that a war that did not bring a gleam of joy to any one household in the whole United Kingdom is at last at an end. If we except unprincipled army contractors, the veriest Shylocks in creation, I do not believe there is in the whole civilised world a feeling save that of thankfulness that there is an end to the fearful waste of life and money that has been the sole outcome of the long struggle; gain there is none to anyone, and who can compute, along with the £230,000,000 of money spent and 65,000 lives lost or wrecked on the British side, the amount of mental and bodily agony suffered at home and abroad during those long two years and eight months? I have heard it said that the grandest prayer the human heart can frame is that prayer so often on Irish lips, the prayer that is indeed now echoed in every heart—no matter on which side, English or Boer, its sympathies—on this declaration of peace: 'thanks be to God!'

The Christian Brothers.

Here in Ireland, simultaneously with many other parts of the world, we have within these last few days been celebrating the victory in a far longer, though bloodless, war that has been waged by a valorous body of Irishmen for an entire century against the powers that for three and a half centuries have sought to crush out the Catholic religion and national feeling from the hearts and lives of the Irish people.

We have been celebrating with joy and pomp the centenary of the foundation of the Institute of Irish Christian Brothers, whose great educational work was begun just one hundred years ago and has for a century been so successfully carried on that the fame of these humble brethren is now world-wide.

Yesterday the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin was thrown open to all who could find room within its walls to join in the religious ceremony of thanksgiving to Almighty God for the hundred years of unbroken success He has granted to the labors of these Christian Irishmen, generation after generation of whom have devoted their lives to the grand service of keeping His holy religion and the sacred love of fatherland in the hearts of those for whom St Patrick prayed so earnestly, yet who seemed doomed, by anti-Catholic laws, to lose their faith and their nationality. But man proposes and God disposes, and one of the great weapons used by the Almighty to frustrate the aims of our powerful Protestant lawgivers has been the great teaching Order of the Irish Christian Brothers, men who voluntarily take up a life of poverty and humility, who labor hard without any worldly reward, who have gone on their way quietly and unostentatiously, working mostly amongst the poor, yet have come to be recognised as a great and successful educational power, a great power in the Church in our land, and now in other lands as well as in this.

All Catholics are aware that what are known as the Penal Laws were the laws enacted from time to time with a view to stamp out the Catholic religion in England and Ireland by penalising every act that could tend in any way to keep that faith in existence, once the English sovereigns had decided to abandon Catholicism and force their subjects to do the same. These laws pressed in an especially heavy manner upon the

Irish, for the simple reason that the more the latter were persecuted the more passionately they clung to their Faith and to their nationality, for love of country has ever been indissolubly bound up with the Irishman's religion, so that in this country the Penal enactments always had a twofold aim: the destruction of the Catholic religion and of all sentiments of nationality. The surest way to attain this end was to deprive the people of both religious and secular education and therefore it was that our priests, the religious teachers and our Catholic schoolmasters, the secular educators were persecuted and hunted as wild beasts, while no parent dared, except at the risk of dire penalties send his child to be instructed save by teachers of an alien faith, and although the Irish Catholics, rich and poor, clung with brave, marvellously brave tenacity to the teachings of their Church and seized upon every opportunity of obtaining secret education wherever and whenever it could be snatched, the work of intellectual destruction was fast being accomplished amongst the poor by the end of the 18th century. How could it be otherwise? The wealthy could sometimes evade the laws and smuggle their sons out of the country to give them such scholastic advantages denied them at home; but for our poor, what was there? On the one hand, total, brutish ignorance, or the daily risk of imprisonment, increased poverty from fines, and other sufferings of untold severity if they were discovered in any attempts to escape from the bonds of ignorance. On the other hand, richly-endowed schools, tempting a people ever greedy of knowledge: schools where they could learn free and obtain worldly help and advancement in trade, business, or profession; every worldly advantage held out as a bait, and the one only thing asked in return was that they should become renegades to the faith of their fathers. By a miracle of grace the people at large accepted the poverty, the ignorance the sufferings of those terrible penal days and trusted in God to release them from their bondage. Those who know what the true history of that noble, long-suffering self-denial of our race is will not consider that I use an exaggerated figure of speech when I say that the Almighty sent the Irish nation a second Moses in the person of Brother Ignatius Rice, the founder of the Irish Christian Brothers, and the man who did so much to lead the Catholic youth of Ireland out of the bondage of ignorance into the light and freedom of Christian knowledge.

The Founder of the Order.

Born in or about the year 1760 in Callan, County Kilkenny, Ignatius Rice was educated partly in his native place, partly in the city of Kilkenny. When nearing manhood, he removed to Waterford to live with a relative and to follow business as a merchant. Being of an earnest, thoughtful turn of mind, Mr Rice pondered often and seriously over the painful condition of ignorance to which the laws had reduced his fellow-Catholics, the children of the poor. He gradually thought out and finally, in 1802, when the Penal Laws were somewhat relaxed, devoted his life to the carrying out of a scheme for the teaching of poor boys, a scheme by means of which these boys should receive an education that would gradually raise them to an equal intellectual footing with their Protestant neighbors and enable them to surmount the social barriers that had been deliberately raised to keep down all who would not abandon the Catholic religion.

In 1802, Ignatius Rice gave up the world and devoted his large fortune and the remainder of his life to this work. He was quickly joined by other men actuated by a like religious and patriotic spirit;

schools were opened, the first in Waterford, and it was not little by little, but by leaps and bounds that the marvellous work of the Irish Christian Brothers progressed. Their system of education was so well thought out and planned that there has never been one backward step in their success since the day the first Christian Brothers' school was opened. Primarily teachers for the poor, accepting no fees, as a rule; receiving no State aid; purely Catholic and eminently national in their teaching, using no books but those compiled by members of their own Order, these Brothers' schools have long been celebrated as some of the best educational establishments in the kingdom, and are frequented not only by the poor, for whom they were originally founded and are still maintained, but by the sons of wealthy Catholics and Protestants who desire a thoroughly sound and useful training for their children.

No favor is shown the rich over the poor lad in these schools; all must stand alike and merit alone takes precedence; hence the fact that we have in our midst numbers of Catholic men of eminence in their various professions who were trained in the Christian Brothers' schools and who gratefully acknowledge that they owe their success in life to that training.

Religious Celebration.

The sight yesterday in the Pro-Cathedral must indeed have been a proud and a happy one for the Brothers present; it was a touching ceremony for others.

The Archbishop of Dublin presided at High Mass and the Lord Mayor and Corporation attended in State, but of all the men in the vast throng that could scarcely get standing room from an early hour in the morning, scarcely ten but were 'old boys' come to offer their thanks to God for the liberty once more to be Catholics, and educated Catholics, in their own land, and to testify their gratitude towards and their love for the unselfish men to whom they owe so much. Looking around at the faces, one could easily tell this. The celebrant of the Mass, the deacon, the subdeacon, the master of ceremonies, and assistants were all 'old boys', so was the eloquent preacher, so were the acolytes, so likewise was Mr Vincent O'Brien, the well-known conductor of the now celebrated Palestrina Choir, all of whose members were or are still Christian Brothers' boys. But it was amongst the congregation one noted best the 'old boys'. There were the successful men, evidently going back in memory over their own lives as they listened to the orator telling of careers such as theirs, there were poor men, but honest, intelligent, respectable, thanking God, as they went back to boyhood's days, for all they had that was denied their fathers, there were old men, the tears rolling down their cheeks, tears, perhaps, of regret that they had not profited to the full as they might have done, by their opportunities, tears for days gone by and memories that had long lain dormant, until some word uttered by the preacher or some boyhood's friend recognised in the throng had awakened and stirred the heart. Yes, it was unmistakably a vast congregation (at least the male portion) of old pupils that listened so eagerly as the speaker told of the starting and growth and now world-wide work of these Irish religious, who have schools not only in every corner of Ireland, but in England, America, Australasia, Africa, India, Gibraltar, even in Rome itself, where they are doing to-day for young Italian boys that for which the founder instituted the Order at home giving young Catholic Italians a good education and striving to free them from the temptations of proselytism which has begun in Rome the very same work that a hundred years ago threatened the faith of the Irish.