

# Irish News

## OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, March, 1903.

### A Big Wind.

And there are still some alive who recollect the big wind of 64 years ago, a hurricane such as visits our mild atmosphere only once in several generations. A few weeks ago, just such another fierce tempest visited us, and there were few hearts unshaken by the terrors of a night such as none of us had ever experienced before. The devastations witnessed next morning were appalling in every spot that lay in the line of each terrific gust of wind: chimneys down, roofs torn off, walls overthrown; as for trees, another generation will have grown up before the havoc amongst trees in every part of Ireland can be repaired. The pride of Dublin was the timber in the Phoenix Park, the finest public park in Europe. Each early summer, in the lovely month of May, thousands flocked out to enjoy the beautiful sight of the park hawthorns in full bloom. It was just as if all the white blossoms in the whole world had gathered together for a maying here, as if millions of young maidens in white were holding revel on the green sward, while the great forest trees, in their freshest green in honor of the May, looked on, like fathers and mothers enjoying the tender beauty of their lovely, flower-decked children. The morning after the storm, in the Park alone 1400 of those forest trees lay low and 1700 of the beautiful hawthorns, so loved by our citizens, were torn up, never again to don their white May crowns.

Fortunately the wind blew off land, so that we had no wrecks along our eastern shore to add to the terrors of that night, and there were no deaths, although there were many miraculous escapes from falling houses and chimney-stacks, we consequently escaped with monetary losses and the beauty of innumerable plantations spoiled, while the old saying, 'it's an ill-wind blows no one good,' is verified in increased employment for the poor and the amount of firewood the latter have obtained even near the cities. I notice some strange freaks of wind: this district was once the port of Dublin and was guarded by seven massive castles built about eight hundred years ago: of these castles three remain, in a more or less ruined condition, the chief ruin having been caused by the hand of man. There are also the remains of a very ancient church. While modern roofs and windows and walls were scattered like chaff before the wind, not a stone was displaced in the old castles or church. A beautiful tree lay along the ground in one spot, its roots torn up and bare, yet clumps of little primroses nestled in the soil close by, perfectly unharmed, their yellow blossoms smiling away in the sunshine that succeeded the night of turmoil and rain; a fine house stood half unroofed, its glass houses one mass of wreckage, while close by a crazy little summer-house, old and roofed with cork, remained, seemingly in better condition than before the storm; a tall stack of chimneys crushed in through a roof, within a few yards, a jaunty little flag-staff as upright as ever; huge elms prostrate, fragile daffodils, gay and unharmed, swinging their pretty heads to and fro in the grass beside the fallen giants. By a curious coincidence, we had not had 'Macbeth' in Dublin for many a long year. Two days after the storm it was given, and I went to see that grand play for the first time in my life. There was an audible laugh heard through the theatre when the actor spoke the lines describing the stormy night 'Where we lay, the chimneys were laid low.' Those who did not know the text seemed to think the lines were a topical allusion introduced by the actor.

### The National Festival.

Never was St. Patrick's Day celebrated in Ireland so fittingly as this year. The people have determined that the feast of our great saint shall no longer be held as if these were still penal days, but that it shall be kept as a genuine religious and national festival, and, with this end in view, strenuous efforts were made to induce all publicans throughout the country to close their bars. Unfortunately, the Government will not give us a law compelling this closing on Sundays and holidays, therefore, moral suasion is the only force available. Happily, this moral suasion was so effective on last St. Patrick's Day that in many towns and country districts not alone were all other business premises closed, but all public houses refrained from opening, in compliance with the requests of the Catholic clergy and of the Gaelic League, and even in Dublin about one half of the licensed premises were shut; consequently, the 'drowning of the shamrock' was almost totally neglected, to the great benefit of the community and the joy of all true lovers of their country. As for the wearing of the national emblem, unless care is taken each year henceforth to re-seed the sod, I fear the genuine plant will quickly disappear, for this Patrick's Day the wearing of the green meant that most people sported what looked like whole acres of trefoil, and if the exportation at all equalled the preparations indicated by the thousands of pretty boxes in florists' and fancy goods' shops, why, shamrock-growing on a big scale will have to be adopted on some national farm, or the plant is doomed.

Three years ago a young Irish soldier was severely punished for appearing on parade with St. Patrick's leaf in his cap. This year a Bill is passed in Parliament making the 17th of March a public holiday for all Ireland.

### Expected Visitors.

Yet another Irish Bill has just been passed through Parliament. It is to enable a great international motor car race to be held in Ireland, and this race of the wealthy is to come off in summer in the midland counties over a course of about 200 miles, the Gordon-Bennett Cup to be competed for on the second day. This event will, of course, bring over American, English, and French millionaires (it is easier to be a millionaire in France than anywhere, for it only means francs) by the score, we can see them in dozens with the naked eye—think of it! I must say that as regards these golden men and women, I am as I was with regard to kings and queens when I was a child. I now know that a king goes about the world in a common hat, and it is most unfair that he should do so, but the men who are made of guinea gold and dollar gold should be obliged, by a special clause in this special Act of Parliament, to have gold hats, or gilt moustaches, or something by which the crowd can know them during the coming summer.

We shall have no end of sights provided for us in Ireland this season. There will be all these wealthy and of course remarkably refined and elegant strangers, male and female, motoring and otherwise touring all over the country in flocks or in coveys, like golden pheasants. If all goes well with the Land Purchase Act, we shall see the King and Queen in July or August. We are to have the Cork Exhibition this summer again, only ten times prettier and more inviting than it was last summer; let us hope it will do as well financially as on the last occasion. Then there will be a variety of motor boat contests on the water in different places, and, of course, the world-renowned autumn Horse Show, which is also a great lady, show, or rather, thousands of ladies trot out wonderful costumes on view; and so on, and so on, enough to make us forget the real end of man altogether.

### Workhouse Reform.

However, all the world is not bent on vain pleasures alone. There are still a goodly number whose happiness lies in striving to make the lot of others better. One of the many schemes on foot towards this end is a much needed and praiseworthy effort to reform, in a measure at least, the pernicious workhouse, or poorhouse system of this country; a system that was never suited to the country, a system by which a staff of officials get every comfort out of the heavy tax imposed for the maintenance of the destitute, and these latter, the old, the young, the sick, and the imbecile, are imprisoned in miserable caravansaries, where few indeed are their comforts and many their woes. Not the least of these woes is the herding of the idle, the worthless, the depraved with those decent poor. It is one of the sores of these cold houses that innocent childhood is not sufficiently protected from evil companionship. An association has been formed amongst earnest-minded Catholics and Protestants, clergy and laity, the object of which is to make these refugees less bleak for the aged, to take away young children altogether from their influence by boarding the little ones out separately in decent families where they will get every chance of becoming honest, worthy members of society, besides being a far less tax upon the public; to make the hitherto idle workhouses deserve their name by obliging all able-bodied inmates, and even casual dwellers, to work at some really useful employments and thus make them less of paupers and less of a drain upon the community. Lastly, there is a scheme under consideration for freeing harmless lunatics, such as idiots, by placing them also out to board in country districts, instead of the state of imprisonment that now renders the lot of these afflicted, yet at times very happy creatures, a miserable lot indeed. It is only just to our poor to say that everywhere they rebelled against the cruel law that shut away the poor 'innocents,' depriving them of the freedom that was the greatest joy of their darkened lives. Restlessness is a part of the malady of idiots, and their wanderings from house to house, amongst well-known faces and where there was ever a kind word of welcome for the 'innocent,' acted as a soothing influence, often as an almost rationalising influence upon the weak-witted, who were looked upon by our simple, kindly country people as lucky, as bringing a blessing upon a house and village, and I have often heard the peasantry speak very regretfully and bitterly of the poor fools having been taken away and locked up. In truth, it is sincerely to be hoped that the association for the improvement of the poorhouse system will succeed in its well-meant efforts.

### Archdiocese of Tuam.

The newly-elected Archbishop of Tuam, the Most Rev. Dr. Healy, is making a visitation of his new diocese and is everywhere received with great warmth. His Grace is a man who will well fill the place left vacant by the death of the much-regretted Archbishop Croke. He is an ardent Irishman who goes in strongly for peasant proprietorship, is a gifted speaker, a learned man, a well-read archaeologist, and a graceful writer. One of his works, 'Early Irish Christian Schools and Scholars,' is amongst the most delightful and valuable works of our time.

M.B.