

CELTIC MANUSCRIPTS.

(From the *Chicago Times*.)

THERE are three very notable volumes in the Chicago Public Library at present. These are the National Manuscripts of Ireland. They consist principally of fac-similes of a page of each of the best known Gaelic, Latin, Norman, French, and English old books produced in Ireland in ancient times, and that have escaped the multitudinous wars and invasions of which that unhappy country was so long the theatre. Judging by the remnant that has been spared by Dane, Norman, and Cromwellian, the early literature of Ireland must have been enormous in quantity; and it seems a strange inversion of facts that the nation of all others of mediæval Europe that was most noted for the production of books and a love of literature should be the one which to-day stands, if not the lowest, at least very low in the scale of education or love for books. However great the distaste for books that too many Irishmen evince at present, it is certain that in the past they held them in the highest veneration, and produced them in extraordinary abundance. A glance over the table of contents of the three volumes under notice will convince the most skeptical of the amount of the existing manuscript matter in the old Gaelic language, not to speak of what is in Latin. The five volumes generally known as the "five great books," contain almost as much matter as exists in manuscripts of equal antiquity in the whole of the rest of Europe! These five books are known by the names of the "Book of the Dun Cow," the "Speckled Book," the "Book of Leinster," the "Book of Ballymoat," and the "Book of Lecan." They were written between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries; but the greater part of them consists of copies of manuscripts of vastly greater age. The "Book of the Dun Cow," for instance, is a copy, or rather a fragment of a copy, of the original, compiled in the latter part of the seventh century. Some of these books are very voluminous, and contain probably as much matter as the Old Testament. One of the strangest things connected with the ancient literature of Ireland is the fact that so little of it is yet translated. There is not an ancient manuscript known to exist either in Saxon, old French, or Norse, that has not been translated and retranslated long ago; but since the death of O'Donovan and O'Curry, very little has been done in the way of translations from the old Gaelic. There are only two volumes of the "Brehon Laws" yet translated, and there are ten volumes yet to be done. One prime cause of the slowness in bringing out translations of the old literature and laws of Ireland is the apathy of the nation at large about them. People who have been born in Ireland, and whose immediate ancestors were English or Scotch, might naturally enough be excused for not taking much interest in such a class of literature; but when we see the loudest-mouthed Fenians and self-styled Nationalists just as apathetic and indifferent as the Saxon about rescuing from oblivion the strongest possible evidences of their country's ancient civilisation, we are forced to come to the conclusion that there is very little hope for Ireland until her children learn to love her better, and that a great deal of what we hear about the patriotism of the Irish people is an exaggeration. Another difficulty exists about translating these old documents, and that is, the extreme antiquity of the language in which most of them are written; and there is yet another difficulty—namely, the contracted form of the writing. However, if the present race of Irish people cared to know what these old books contained, and to purchase them when translated, translators would be soon found in abundance. Whatever has already been done in translating and copying these old books has been done almost altogether at the expense of the British Government. Matthew Arnold in his "Celtic Literature," speaks in the strongest terms of the immensity as of the interesting quality of the old literature of Ireland. He has, in fact, paid it a higher tribute of praise than any Irish writer ever has paid it; and Germany, as a nation, has done nearly as much to bring the ancient literature of Ireland under notice as Ireland herself has done. Within the last twenty-five years a school of German philologists has sprung up, and has given a great stimulus to the study of old Gaelic; and it seems probable that if the ten volumes of Brehon law tracts are ever translated the work will be done by the scholars of Germany. It must, however, be admitted that John O'Donovan was the man who not only gave the first real stimulus to the study of ancient Celtic literature, but who saved a good deal of it from destruction. There were great piles of vellum manuscripts in many libraries in Great Britain and Ireland that excited hardly any interest, simply because they were known to be Irish, and little curiosity, because no one could decipher them. As soon, however, as some of them were translated, their quaintness and beauty excited considerable interest, and O'Donovan kept on translating them as long as he lived. His death seems to have been followed by a general apathy with regard to early Celtic literature, and with the exception of what his assistant and contemporary, O'Curry, translated, very little has been done since his death to familiarise the English reader with the hidden treasures of the early Celtic. But the work achieved in the three volumes of Irish national manuscripts under notice is a step in the right direction. Nothing can exceed the admirable style in which these colossal volumes are brought out; no expense seems to have been spared on them, and to the lover of literature, no matter what his nationality may be, or to the artist, it is hardly too much to say that they are the most interesting books in the library; the Irish race may feel justly proud of them. It is true that they are a treat for the artist as well as the antiquarian; the *fac similes* of illuminated letters from the book of Kells and other manuscripts are amongst the greatest pictorial works of art extant; the very writing is a marvel of beauty and style. In fact, the illuminated Irish manuscripts, as works of art, excel those of any other nation. Large as the three volumes are, they are not large enough to give specimens of all the Irish national manuscripts; but all the important ones known to exist in Great Britain and Ireland, not including the Brehon law tracts, are mentioned in a summary attached to each volume, and the time when the manuscripts were written is also mentioned as nearly as can be

ascertained. There are, however, large quantities of Gaelic manuscripts in the libraries of the Continent which are not noticed in these volumes. The citizens of Chicago, the Irish ones especially, should feel grateful to Mr. W. J. Onahan, as he was mainly instrumental in having those magnificent books got into the Public Library here, and it speaks well for the literary taste and enterprise of Chicago that she was the first city in the United States to become possessed of such expensive but most interesting books.

A NEW PRIMATE.

(From the *Sydney Express*.)

HAVING been recognised, according to the "Consti-two-tion," as representative head of the State at the lighthouse, Sir Henry Parkes, as is fitting, has now been recognised as representative head of the Church by the Anglican hierarchy at the Symposium at St. Paul's. And we must confess that the Premier proved himself more than equal to the occasion, and read such a lesson to the Right Rev. Bench and to the major and minor clergy as ought to serve for a starting-point for a new era in the Protestant religion. Under the pleasing disguise of proposing "health and long life" to the bishops and clergy, the "illustrious statesman," as Bishop Pearson cleverly called him, not only took his place amongst them as Primate, but also entered with gusto into vexed church questions, laying down the law, distributing praise and blame and dealing out "sweetness and light," of his own peculiar sort, whilst indulging in those indefinite generalities which sail very near the verge of nonsense, but are not nonsense because they have no outline. For a politician to claim to be the representative of the Church of England, is one thing; for him to be accepted by the Church of England, with unmitigated jingling of glasses, and universal post-prandial applause, is another. We do not remember ever having come across a similar instance. Men of business will possibly consider that their church is wise in its generation, in exchanging the monotonous proprieties and mental woodenness of Bishop Barker for the elastic metaphysics, the soaring faith, and the unapproachable morality—commercial and otherwise—of a really successful adventurer, who knows how to put his apron on with any bishop on the bench, and how to turn the world, the flesh, and the Devil himself, to good account.

The new Primate was good enough to inform the bishops and clergy that, in his humble opinion, the "Gospel" could never be excelled; which opinion, considering the times we live in, and some of the Evangelical provisions concerning honesty, no doubt, is reassuring. He then proceeded to inform them what their duty was with regard to the teachings of Revelation. Above all things they should strenuously exercise themselves in the "very principles of their Church politic," which consist, it seems, in encouraging "freedom" and "discussion" and "diversity of opinion" regarding the Christian faith; evidently, with the object of avoiding that terrible monotony which ever seems to accompany the possession of acknowledged truth. Having laid down this important canon regarding their theological procedure with the people, the Lord Primate went on to inform the clergy that they had especial advantages in this country for making their mission a success. Slightly differing—no doubt on the principle of "diversity of opinion"—from St. Paul, he attributed these exceptional advantages to the natural wealth of the colony, and to the fact that "units" come here every year "from the most enlightened nations of the earth," and that our population is composed of "the very best elements that could enter into the formation of a nation." So that having "units" to work upon with plenty of money in their pockets, and made of the "very best" material, the clergy had no excuse for not stirring up plenty of animated "discussions" and "diversities of opinion," about, for instance, the existence of God, the divinity of Christ, the immortality of the soul, and the character of the Old and New Testament; which exercises, forming the "very principles of their Church politic," they ought to be continually employed in. We, in our simplicity, imagined that the Anglican clergy had not done so badly in this respect. But the Primate seemed to think otherwise. A shade of regret passed over his chiselled features as he told his spiritual children that though he did feel tempted to flatter them—he ought to have been proposing their "health"—he would sternly do violence to his nature. He would, notwithstanding his tender love for them, or rather, perhaps, in consequence of it—leave them in agonising suspense as to what his opinion was—as to whether they had made a disgraceful *fiasco* or not. At all events, he would not allay their curiosity further than by saying that if they had been a failure, it was their own fault, for they had had every possible chance of being a great success. Having thus prepared the way, he let it out upon them with great gravity—such as would have made Mr. Justice Windeyer's fortune—that they were, in spite of all their advantages, altogether behind the age. He informed them that there was another Church—a Church which, in its folly, discountenanced all wrangling over the Creed, admitted no "diversity of opinion" on articles of faith, and encouraged simple belief in the Gospel—which, in spite of all these drawbacks, was outpacing them in the race of influence and power. With solemn sadness of tone, and one fair-sized tear floating in his apostolic eye, the Primate referred to the "discouragement" he was suffering from the fact of the Catholic clergy "outstripping" the Anglicans in zeal, and extending their influence beyond that of the Church of England. And what he felt to be more heart-rending still was, that the Catholic priests were not only more zealous, but, comparatively, also far more numerous than the Protestant parsons.

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