

Irish News.

OUR IRISH LETTER.

Dublin, January 2, 1899.

THE New Year has come to us with a howl. With the exception of a spell in late autumn, we had, up to the eve of 1899, such soft, summer-like weather that the daisies were raising their 'wee, crimson-tipped' heads in the meadows, and the thrushes were making the air ring with their sweet melody. But scarcely had the joy-bells ceased ringing in the young year than a storm arose, just such as used to arise in the good old times when nursery rhymes were invented, and all the wicked fairies who were not invited to the christening of the young year or the young princess raised a tempest in the air and came on the wings of the whirlwind to pour their wrath out upon old and young.

According to the Almanac, the wicked fairies are upon us. *Moore's Almanac—Farmers' Almanac—Moore's Almanac for the New Year.* To how many old folk, ending their days far from the Old Country, will those words, cried in a quaint minor cry bring back youth, father, mother, neighbours, home! the country town, with its streets thronged, the old-times Christmas and New Year's greetings! Well, still at the same season of the year the cry rings out in exactly the same tones, still *Moore's Almanac* is bought and read, and this year it foretells us such woeful things that we all feel tempted to emigrate until 1899 shall have been ushered in. The booming of cannon is to be the liveliest music heard; death is to fill the land with mourning; the Royal Family of England is to suffer woe untold; storms are to spread desolation far and wide—in fine, each month, from January to December, has such tribulations marked out as its portion that the inhabitants of the British Isles would want stout hearts to bear all their bad bill of fare. What a Job's comforter the editor of *Moore's Almanac* must be!

Well, '98 has not been such a bad year for us here in Ireland. It has not been a year of great commercial prosperity, it is true; but it was one to test the spirit of the people, to test in what have they lost as a nation, what gained. Are the people weary of their long struggle for independence? Are they, as has been so confidently predicted they would be, sick of the personal disagreements of the leaders of the National party—disagreements brought about and fomented by English agency as part of a system in use since the Anglo-Norman first set foot on Irish soil. Have they laid aside their national aspirations and given over striving after their ideal? Not at all; if anything, they are more determined than ever to one day have the management of their own affairs, be that day near or afar off. The centenary year of 1898 began with general demonstrations on the part of the Irish of Ulster, Munster, Leinster, and Connaught—and that is all the Ireland there is—demonstrations intended not alone to show their undying gratitude to the men who gave their lives one hundred years ago to try and free their native land, but even still more to prove that the spirit of the people is unconquerable. What could not, dared not, be done 100, 50, 25 years ago, was done last year. The graves that hold the honoured remains of the patriots of 1798-1803, those graves that had hitherto been studiously dishonoured by the Government, are now, one and all, made prominent as monumental milestones in the path of history. More still has been done. All over the land

MONUMENTS

have been raised in many public places to the memory of the dead, and one of the foundation stones laid during the year was on a site marked out in one of the most prominent and beautiful parts of Dublin, where a monument to Theobald Wolfe Tone is to be erected shortly. The closing hours of '98 witnessed an enormous torchlight procession through Dublin, when many thousands of Nationalists paid tribute to the memories of the heroes of 1798. The route taken by the procession passed by the house where Wolfe Tone was born, that where Dr. R. R. Madden (the historian of the united Irishmen) was born, the house where Robert Emmet was seized, the spot where Lord Edward Fitzgerald died and so many brave hearts broke. Not one spot in Dublin connected with the sad events of '98 was left unvisited, and many were the heartfelt prayers offered for the repose of the patriots' souls as the vast procession uncovered and paused a moment in solemn silence at the spot where Robert Emmet was executed, or at one or other place connected with the sad events of those sorrowful days. All over the country the same scene on a lesser scale marked the close of the year. In Belfast alone a counter demonstration took place and, of course, uncomplimentary compliments were interchanged. But, after all, a little contradiction is good for us.

Last year also saw the people more intelligently doing their own thinking. The school instruction that is all so methodically cut and

dry and laid ready for the memory to work it, while leaving the intelligence little or nothing to work out for itself, is not a good system. The working of English Board Schools and the Irish National Board, intermediate and general cram systems has conclusively proved this. So it was in a measure with Ireland while there was an Irish leader who, as was said of O'Connell, had behind him a long tail that wagged to right or left just as the nerves from the leader's brain ran down his spine and indicated wagging. Fortunately both backbone and tail usually went in the right direction, and so our people fell into the way of being wagged too. But when things went wrong, when the selfish side of man broke out, that self that has been spoiling him since the days of Adam, when this or that man began to say: 'I am better, and more clever, and more gifted than my brother—why should I not stand above him?' then the nerve power went astray, the tail could no longer wag, it became all disjointed, and now the people have to do all their own thinking, which is not such a misfortune in the end. The consequence is—not as was hoped by the wire-pullers, a general collapse and state of hopeless consternation amongst the people, but a determined and manly stand for the one principle that has animated them all these years and against the disunion amongst a few prominent political men who have been injuring not alone themselves, but what is of far more consequence, their common country. The outcome of the attitude lately taken by the people is a

STERN DEMAND FOR PEACE,

peace from petty personal strife, or else let these men who will not unite with the rest stand aside. The principal public bodies, boards of guardians, and corporate bodies have taken upon themselves the task of calling decisively for this union, and their argument is: if these men will neither lead nor drive, they must be driven, for we must have our efforts to obtain our freedom unhampered, and we will choose the men who will work together for the good of our country. For this end, a Convention for Munster is to be held in Limerick, all the Irish Members of Parliament being invited to meet there in order to confer amicably together for the public good and renounce their own whim-whams for ever. The only important Irish M.P.'s who seem unwilling to submit to this very reasonable desire on the part of the nation are Mr. T. Healy and Mr. John Redmond.

Another outcome of the spirit of '98 is an organisation begun in Mayo by the ever active Mr. William O'Brien, and now spreading rapidly and gaining popularity throughout the other western counties that suffer most severely from the harsh and unjust land system that keeps the Irish peasantry in such poverty that one bad season is enough to make bankrupts of hundreds. Mr. O'Brien is looked upon by many as an enthusiast, a visionary. Well, there are times when it takes an enthusiast to tackle certain subjects. Inebriates and Irish landlords are amongst these subjects. But in starting this organisation Mr. O'Brien has shown both enthusiasm and common sense. On his platform of the

UNITED IRISH LEAGUE

all 'Ites' stand shoulder to shoulder in perfect unity; better still, the old bond between priests and people seems stronger-knit than ever, and in each district in which the United Irish League is established, Mr. O'Brien's meetings are presided over by the Catholic clergy of the parish, and their powerful aid is due much of the League's phenomenal success.

This organisation is an effort to do in reality what Government professed to do when they established what is known as the 'Congested Districts' Board,' a costly institution which, no doubt, does some good, but that good mostly falls to the lot of the host of officials employed, while there is almost total neglect of the work for which the Board was created, i.e., that of relieving so-called congested districts by taking out of them the surplus tenantry, placing these latter elsewhere on some of the vast ranches of rich land where they and their families could live comfortably, then enlarging, for the benefit of the remaining peasantry, the miserable holdings that make up the congested districts. This is the work Mr. O'Brien's organisation has set itself to do by the suppression of land grabbing and by inducing graziers—through the medium of public opinion—to turn the vast tracts of land into farms to be let at fair remunerative rents to agriculturists. I can perhaps show in a few words where the actual rights of the people to agitate comes in.

Mayo is in Connaught, and although there are large tracts of rich lands, much of Connaught was, and is, so barren that Oliver Cromwell's expression, when about to drive Irish and Anglo-Normans from the rich provinces, was 'to

HELL OR CONNAUGHT

with them!' Yet to this partially barren land the Irish grew passionately attached as generation after generation came to call it home, and their patient industry transformed many a waste tract

THE MASSIVE

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