

Irish News.

OUR IRISH LETTER.

Dublin, January 9.

THE question of the over-taxation of Ireland is again to the fore and has gathered new strength, if we may judge by a large meeting just held at the Mansion House in Dublin. Influential men of every shade of politics and religion, including some advanced thinkers amongst the nobility, were present, and if millions of words could be turned into golden coin! Let it be remembered what the question is. It is that Ireland, in spite of the articles of union, has been made to pay an ever-increasing taxation over and above her fair proportion as a part of the British Empire. This surplus taxation is not far from £3,000,000 per annum, so that the arrears due to this country amount to something like £250,000,000, without counting compound interest, which we would handsomely forgive. The questions agitating great and small are: how to get these millions refunded? how to get rid of this unjust taxation?

New Year's Day was celebrated in Catholic Dublin according to the custom that has been observed for many years past. A solemn thanksgiving service was celebrated at the Pro-Cathedral, Archbishop Walsh officiating at the High Mass, at which the Lord Mayor and Corporation were present in state. Afterwards the Lord Mayor entertained his Grace and some hundreds of the principal citizens at a banquet in the Mansion House.

This, we may say, was the last official and social function at which our Lord Mayor during 1898 presided, for on Thursday, at 5 o'clock, the Corporation ceased to exist, pending the first municipal elections for the Urban Councils, which will replace the old Corporations, and which will take place throughout Ireland on the 16th January. The general upheaval caused by the substitution of the new popular County Councils for the Grand Jury system has not come on quite yet, but we hear the rumblings.

GUINNESS'S STOUT.

What would be the condition of these Islands were all the poor to become total abstainers? If we could get together the statistics of the wealth put by the poor of every country into the hands of men living by the drink business, the result would be striking. Lord Iveagh is only one individual of that Guinness family who have made their immense fortunes by brewing porter, which is mostly consumed by the humbler classes. The fortune of this one man alone is stated to be over £14,000,000. The interest on that sum would be £540,000 a year, and on that sum 2240 working-men and their families could live well, as each would have £250 per annum. What fools to themselves drunkards are!

Lord Iveagh and other members of the Guinness family certainly make princely gifts, though England benefits most by this generosity. His latest gift to Dublin (where all the porter is made) is both a kind and a munificent one. He offers to finance a scheme for the re-housing of the very poor within a certain area in the city of Dublin, and his plans are most generous, providing not alone decent dwellings, but also places of recreation for body and mind. A company with a similar purpose has also been started with a capital of £20,000 in £1 shares, so as to enable even the working classes themselves to have a share in the scheme, a thing which would be a great incentive to thrift amongst the class, of all others which is practically shut out from all ways of profitably and securely investing their small earnings. His Grace Archbishop Walsh applied for 500 shares and was, I believe, the first shareholder.

A good deal has already been done in Dublin in gradually providing healthy and neat houses for the better class artisans. But in an old city like Dublin, this was a costly work. Hitherto—and of course the same state of things largely prevails—the labouring classes, forming a very large share of the population, were housed in tenements, these tenements being the cast-off city mansions and large houses of the nobles and wealthy residents of the pre-Union days when Dublin was one of the gayest cities in Europe. When the Union carried the Irish nobles and members of Parliament away to London, one mansion after another fell into disuse until whole streets were deserted; then by degrees the houses came to be let out in parts, fell lower and lower; the better class left the neighbourhood of the fast decaying streets, until finally whole districts of magnificent houses became common lodging quarters, the fine dwellings, too costly to be kept in proper repair, became a thousand times shabbier and more insanitary than the poorest cottage in the country could be, the once stately streets became great, unkempt emporiums of shabbiness, neglect, ill-health, and all the ills of overcrowding. So the lodging of this large class of the very poor still

remains a disgrace to our city, and the work now about to be undertaken is one of the most urgently needed public works of the day.

As you no doubt receive in New Zealand all

NEW BOOKS

worth reading that are issued over here, I will mention two that help eminently to fill a much-felt want in Catholic literature: well-written books for youths at college. One of these books, *Geoffrey Austin, Student*, appeared a year or two ago and was most favourably received by reviewers. The second, *The Triumph of Failure*, has only appeared with the New Year. It is a sequel to *Geoffrey Austin*, and both are from the pen of a gifted priest, the Rev. P. A. Sheehan, of the diocese of Cloyne. Both works deal in a very practical, real life way with certain rocks that lie in the path of all young students, and, unhappily, trip a great many up. Young people cannot always be persuaded that they have not older heads on their shoulders than their elders. They cannot always be convinced that it is not possible for them to possess the ripeness and depth of judgment that only come with grey hairs, much study, and more experience. It is very, very difficult to make them appreciate how very little the most learned of men can know, compared with the vast amount of subjects no human mind can grasp; above all, it is very difficult for them to realize the greatness of humility, the humility that is often actually a proof of great knowledge. And so they unhappily sometimes fall into a pitiful habit of pitting their intellects against the omniscience of the Almighty. It is with all this Father Sheehan deals in a most powerful manner in his two books, books which no youth would casually throw aside, so fascinating is the style and the story, and certainly they are works which ought to open many a father's mind as well as the minds of students.

Speaking of

YOUNG MEN,

there is a great deal of good work being done in our large cities just now through a movement which, I think, in great part emanates from young Catholics themselves, and which, curiously enough, seems like a response to the very books of which mention has just been made. The movement is amongst the assistants employed in various classes of business houses, who are, by their own desire, being organised into religious sodalities. One large class, grocers' and publicans' assistants, have just this week formed a sodality numbering 1,500, all earnestly joining together for mutual help in leading true Christian lives; this is but one of many such associations in Dublin, yet there are some who speak and write as if religion were dying out amongst our people.

SOCIAL DOINGS.

How do you amuse yourselves in New Zealand society? Pretty much, I have no doubt, as people do over here: the same social gatherings, afternoon at homes taking the place of the old-times pleasant informal evening dances; occasional big balls where no one is really happy; for of the hospitable 'come and take pot-luck with me' of our mothers' days, instead, a rare, costly dinner party; even for afternoon visits, people only receiving their friends twice, or at most three times a month, instead of every day taking chance of some few friendly faces dropping in to vary the household routine; the same frantic cycling around after excitement, with—in consequence—almost total loss of the capacity for true enjoyment. I wonder will the next century—how near we all are to being 'people of the last century'—bring some wholesome reaction. Will people grow sick of wanting to seem richer, faster, cleverer, more highly 'higher educated,' more everything than they really are. Shall we go back to simpler, more wholesome tastes and pleasures; shall we, in the words of the very exemplary Rev. Henry Sandford (on lease to the 'Vicar of Bray'), not only be as good as we are, but as good as we ought to be?

Meanwhile we work like slaves here (and I suppose in New Zealand) to be not only as happy as we are, but as happy as we ought to be. Dublin never had a run of theatrical amusements or better accommodation than at present: tragedy, comedy, historic plays, comic opera, pantomime. The historic is supplied by a powerful drama founded on the life and death of Wolfe Tone, given at the Queen's, which, spite of its name, has come to be the stage for ultra-national plays. 'Lord Edward, or '98,' which was such a brilliant success, was produced here, and 'Wolf Tone' promises to be as popular.

Our theatres are now models of comfort, beauty and safety, although the working people of Dublin nightly look for the burning down of the pretty gem, the Gaiety, as there is a popular belief that such must be its fate. It appears that the completion of the old Royal (which boasted the largest stage in Europe) was worked at into the morning of Christmas Day, in order to have all ready for the opening of the theatre on the following Boxing night. The

THE MASSIVE

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