

CHRISTCHURCH.

(From our special Correspondent.)

THERE is nothing very startling agitating the social or political atmosphere in Christchurch this week. The installation of some wonderfully exalted member of the Masonic Craft in some kind of office of tremendous altitude, and the reception of Bishop Julius have been the great social events. The first-mentioned affair was comparatively quiet. The arrival and induction of the Bishop was not so. His arrival was heralded by a vigorous and presumably joyous clanging of the Cathedral bells. That event took place on Wednesday, and ever since at all hours of the day and nearly at all hours of the night, these awful bells seem to be haunted by a sense that in some way or other they had failed in doing their duty upon the first night, and are seized with a desire to make up for their remissness. Forthwith they start again with their eternal clang, clang, until one feels inclined to wish that they would suddenly share the fate of the Inchcape Bell, and be dropped into the bottom of the sea.

The gentleman who is indirectly the cause of all this jangle, is I believe a first-rate fellow, in addition to being a fluent and eloquent speaker. He is not a stiff starched individual by any means. I do not know if he, like some clergymen in Christchurch, is a crack man at "potting" a hare, but it is said he rides a bicycle. Now a man who having donned the gaiters, still rides a bicycle cannot possibly be classed as a clerical poker hack. The bicycle business quite dispels any suspicion as to his having to much buckram in his composition. He is certainly not likely to be a worse bishop or a worse man on that account. Still it does cause a kind of mild shock to one's system to think of those gaitered legs astride of that very modern and very unsteady, looking machine. However, I suppose this is only a fresh instance of how "old order changes."

The only other ripple upon the social surface here just now is caused by the Early Closing Association. An agitation in favour of shutting shops at nine on Saturday nights has been going on for some time. For the past few Saturday nights the streets have been paraded by a crowd, which hooted before every shop in which the lights had not disappeared at that magic hour. Having secured the boon of getting the shutters put up at nine, the Association, possibly a little intoxicated with success, has now insisted upon making six the closing hour for grocers. Last Saturday night this new system got its first trial. All the grocers closed promptly at six—at least all but one, and he did a roaring trade all night. Of course they will all keep open next Saturday night. They will not permit a brother tradesman a monopoly of garnering all the grain, in the shape of the abundant harvest of dollars that is to be reaped after six o'clock on Saturday night. The Association is furious at this recreant grocer, and will lay at his door the whole blame of the system breaking down. But if they do they will be wrong. They will be incapable of discriminating between cause and effect. It will not be the grocers' fault. It will be the fault of the Association for trying to prematurely force upon the public an unwelcome movement. If the Association had been content to rest satisfied with what it had achieved, in getting the hours shortened till nine on Saturday, they might ultimately have gradually worked it down till six. But it foolishly thought to carry their scheme by a grand coup. The steady-going, jog-trot, Saturday-night-grocery-baying old public does not like grand coups. It will not, I feel sure, be compelled against its will to swallow its tea, change its shirt, put on a clean collar, grab its Maori-kit, and rush through its shopping before six. The one grocer who keeps open will rapidly amass a tremendous fortune, or the others will open again next Saturday. The latter will be the case. Then the Association will have made the mistake of damaging its cause by a conspicuous failure. Until the Association learns the wisdom of bringing the public round to its way of thinking by reasoning instead of by arbitrary measures, I am afraid that it will not have "hitched its waggon to the star that is destined to ascend."

The "Little Lord Fauntleroy" Company arrived yesterday and gave its initial performance last night. The dramatised version of Mrs Burnett's delightful novel proved a very attractive bill of fare to theatre-goers. The house was well filled and the performers were enthusiastically applauded. The little lady, who took the part of the chivalrous little chap who had such an awful horror of becoming an earl, acquitted herself splendidly. It seems a most marvellous thing that a simple story of a child's life should take such a hold upon the imagination of the public, which imagination has been so much sated in late years with degenerated, sensational, unwholesome literature. That "Little Lord Fauntleroy" is such a success, both as a novel and a drama, is, I think, proof, that humanity still has a taste for what is good and pure. Any person who appreciates two hours' genuine and innocent amusement should not miss the opportunity of seeing this most exquisite idyll enacted before the footlights.

La Grippe has been having a grand innings in Christchurch. Everybody has had it; you meet the victims by scores in the streets; you recognise these stricken individuals at once. They have much the same characteristics as the "Jackdaw of Rheims" had after his fall from grace. They are "no longer gay as yesterday, their feathers all seem to be turned the wrong way; their eye so dim, so wasted each limb," that you feel when you meet them that La Grippe's mournful victims are before you. But it is all very well to laugh at this somewhat ridiculous epidemic. Its visitations are not always laughing matter. Father O'Connor of Rangiora has found it a very serious matter. He has scarcely been out of bed since Easter. He got the disease, resumed work too soon, got a relapse and has been laid up now for weeks. I believe he is becoming convalescent, but is still very far indeed from being his old self.

Father Halbwachs has taken his departure for Shand's Track, where he is to act as lieutenant to Father Chervier. His absence will leave Father Cummings very short handed at present.

On the 24th of May, Father Le Menant is to hold a grand fête in Lancaster Park, for the benefit of St. Mary's. I am not quite sure as to the nature of the affair, but most heartily wish the indefatigable church builder the very best of Queen's weather upon his gala day,

and hope that Lancaster Park has never been half so well patronised before, as it will be on the forthcoming twenty-fourth of May.

From a private letter from Home, I learn that the past winter has been a terribly severe one in the Old Country. "The worst for sixty years," writes my correspondent, who further says, "I have been at the other end of the village but once since the winter began. When I look out at the snow and the everlasting rain, and feel the bitter cold, I think of your beautiful climate in New Zealand. I would never advise any one who has lived beneath the sunny skies of Australia or New Zealand to come Home to stay. It is so bitterly cold." The influenza, she says, has been in every house in the country. Not one family has escaped. The young men and women, she says, are leaving Ireland in shoals, and only the old people are staying behind. Poor old Erin! deserted by her children! How sad is the spectacle. Will the day ever come for our country when she will cease to say to her people, "Whither, oh, whither, so swiftly flying, far from your ancient and storied land?" At present it almost seems that poor old Ireland's mission is to rear men and women to adorn other lands, while the dear old home in which they spent their first years is doomed to be left lonely and desolate. Perhaps the day will come when she will call them back to her "as the hen does her chickens." Meanwhile, perhaps she is hastening her own destiny by sending her children abroad. Perhaps the hands of these banished ones will, at no distant day, help to place the crown of freedom upon her brow. Beneath other skies than their own they will best learn how inestimable are the rights which they crave for her, and how well within the bounds of justice they are in claiming those rights.

The cabmen of Christchurch have been lashing the ocean into foam to drown a fly. The particular fly which they are panting to drown is Constable Kelly at the railway station. This officer, according to the cabmen, has made things so tropical for them that they have resolved that they will not crack a whip in the vicinity of the railway station until the obnoxious officer has been removed. The station-master objects to his removal. So there is a dead lock. As a consequence the travelling public has to be its own porter, and is compelled to carry its own portmanteaus, hat boxes, etc., to its hotel. There is to be a big meeting, presided over by the Mayor, to settle the difficulty. Poor Constable Kelly is having greatness thrust upon him. To be the subject of a public meeting is a distinction which is not accorded to every one. I fancy that he will have to go. The fellows have got the whip hand of him when they are in a position to put pressure upon the public.

The surf upon the Summer Beach to-day was the roughest that I have ever seen there. The spectacle was really grand as the long line of white-crested waves rose, and, breaking into spray, dashed upon the shore. The Cape Rock, which is usually covered with people on Sundays, was deserted. It was encircled with the water which surged and whirled round it and poured in streams through the hollow arches under it. The air was piercingly cold, and the crowd of Sunday seaside visitors were glad to return to town.

The weather here is delightfully fine. In fact, we are having Summer in May.

The *Press* this morning is demanding a change in the Charitable Aid System. It is about time that something was done in the matter. Members stirked it last session. The longer it is left untouched, the more difficult it will become to effect a reform. As it is, this pauperising system is demoralising the poor of the Colony. It is making the idle and worthless more idle and worthless still, and is offering a premium to honest poverty to degenerate into pauperism. The politician who would have grit enough and common sense enough in him to grapple with the matter and eliminate from the statutes of New Zealand the present Charitable Aid Act would deserve the lasting gratitude of this Colony.

It is a fashion with some non-Catholic writers to account the so-called Reformation the forerunner of modern democratic movements and popular enlightenment. But a popular Protestant writer, Madam Louisa Muhlbach, has the courage of a contrary conviction. She writes in her "John Milton and his Times":—"The Reformation was far more advantageous to the princes than to the people. It enriched the kings and impoverished the people."

The *Pilot* has observed from time to time in certain Protestant juvenile publications—notably the *Sunday School Times*—a disposition to revert to Catholic annals for examples of charity or heroism. The appended, which occurs in the Rev. D. Sutherland's paper on "The Aid of the Imagination in Bible Study," is a case in point. Writes Dr. Sutherland:—"It must, however, be admitted that in some children the faculty is somewhat latent, and needs to be developed. They seem to have very great difficulty in seeing anything that is not visible to the outward eye. A lady who has had considerable experience in teaching gives us an instance in point. She told the same story, on one occasion, to a company of Irish boys and girls of the peasant class, and, on another occasion, to a company of English boys and girls of a corresponding station in life. The story was about the French nuns going to the scaffold. In the dark days of the Revolution, singing as they went the "Te Deum," and continuing the verses, in lessening numbers, as head by head fell until the abbess alone was left. Even then the heroic abbess was undaunted. Looking steadfastly on the headless bodies of her followers, she sang, triumphantly, the "Gloria in Excelsis," and ceased not until the knife struck. The story was told graphically and dramatically, but it did not produce a like effect. With sparkling eyes and eager faces the Irish children exclaimed, "What a glorious death to die!" The English children looked as blank as the wall of the room in which they sat, kept silent, and when they did break their silence it was but to remark, "She told us about a lot of women having their heads cut off." The beauty and pathetic power of the tale were lost on the second audience, as the storyteller saw at once, from sheer lack of imaginative training." It is hard for our Protestant friends to realise how powerfully the quick imagination was aided by the religious faith of the Irish children, and the sympathetic stirring of martyrs' blood in their own veins.