

Irish News

OUR IRISH LETTER

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, October, 1907.

The long-looked-for Irish International Exhibition has come and nearly gone. It has been a mixed pleasure. The buildings and grounds are extensive and handsome, and the show has given a vast deal of amusement to thousands of people during the summer. But these are the gay thousands who have no interest in the profit and loss part of the business, who enjoy fluttering round pretty toys and showing off bright toilettes, and meeting friends at dinners and teas while bands play and merry gossip keeps time to the music. But as a great international exhibition of all that is rare and beautiful in home and foreign countries, as an educational undertaking, or as a financial helping-hand to Ireland, it has been a failure. A failure foreseen by those who best understood two things, namely, the needs of Ireland, and what is meant by an international exhibition. The former, an undertaking that would help Ireland, is simple enough and could easily have been managed on a comparatively small and paying scale. This country wants a handsome and central showroom at home for all her own products, a showroom in which these products—which are still many and varied—could be displayed so advantageously and so enticingly that they would induce us all to keep our money in the country, where it is so badly needed, and would also induce buyers from other nations to deal with us, which many could do with profit to themselves. Very pretty buildings could have been erected, sufficient for this purpose and at a tithe of the cost of the extensive, scattered, and half-empty halls erected at heavy outlay and only for six months. On the other hand, an international exhibition means a really grand and wonderful gathering together of all that is rare, beautiful, and costly to produce and transport; an impossibility for a country geographically situated as Ireland is. Then, we have always two strongly antagonistic parties here: the Irish Nationalists who, though perhaps not always wisely so, are all heartily anxious to help whatever movement is for the real prosperity of the country and her people, and amongst these all who come of alien blood or who differ from us in religion would be counted would they only be honest friends to the land and to its own Catholic people. But here is the great difficulty. Those accustomed to maintain an ascendancy by keeping all the loaves and fishes to themselves will not hear of a free field to all and no favor: it is only necessary that any project should be recommended by the Party called Nationalists, or Home Rulers—who are simply those who believe that Irishmen could manage their own household for themselves—to have that project condemned as dangerous. So, as the Nationalists wished to hold a purely Irish exhibition in 1907, the ascendancy party insisted upon an international show. That was not enough: trade was bad and hundreds of workmen idle, yet the contract for extravagantly large buildings was given out of the country, strange tradesmen brought in to carry out the contract, and even the catering given to London, a serious loss during a long summer, and a course of action that would have, and rightly so, given rise to disturbances in England could Englishmen have been guilty of such disloyalty to their own starving tradesmen under similar circumstances.

As might be expected, foreign exhibits were few and poor; British equally scarce and poor; Ireland had been cold-shouldered and did badly, with the exception of local shopkeepers and lace exhibits from convents; the cost of construction and maintenance was greater than could be counterbalanced by the influx of visitors, and so, although the King and Queen did come over and graciously visit and admire, the general voice of all parties now proclaims failure. There was even a story current amongst non-Catholics to the effect that the King and Queen were displeased to find almost empty buildings and grounds when they paid their visit, but I do not vouch for this. I know that if it be true, it is not that their Majesties are not personally popular in Dublin, for they are, but that the managing committee bungled that business as well as many other matters. Instead of doing what they could to have a gathering of those the Royal Family would best like to see, the people, the committee strove to turn the King and Queen into a money-making show, raised the entrance price during the Royal

visit to a prohibitive rate for the masses, and hence the half-empty halls that, people say, chilled and pained their Majesties—who, as I have said, are personal favorites with the Irish. As a passing remark, since he came to the throne, the King has not looked so well or so young as he did this year.

New Zealand and Canada.

have good departments in the exhibition as advertisements for emigration agents. New Zealand shows her beautiful native timbers for rough and fine use; her wool, cloths, blankets, hemp, etc.; her butter and cheese; her freezing apparatus and frozen meat, and many other important products, besides supplying much highly interesting information on all possible subjects. All this information is compiled in London at the emigration offices and issued by his Majesty's Stationery Office. A note on the cover of one of these books states that these most attractive inducements to the youth of our sorely drained country to quit it are exhibited at, and may be had free of charge from more than 1000 public libraries, Urban District Councils, and institutions. So full and minute is all this hopeful information given that we even learn that we may bring out our bicycles free to New Zealand. Now, there are some very heavy drains on our population, steadily sapping the life of the nation year by year. One of these is the absolute plague of consumption that seems to have seized on the poorer classes almost as the sleeping sickness has seized upon the natives of a part of Africa. Twelve thousand died of the disease, in one form or another, last year, and the malady is on the increase. You will say, what has this to do with a New Zealand department in the Dublin Exhibition? Much. Various causes of the spread of consumption are put forward by alarmed clergy and medical men. Some of these causes have been in existence for centuries during which Ireland produced men and women of perhaps the finest physique in the world: poor food, poor clothing, bad housing, yet what may be called the epidemic of consumption is a recent thing. But one very strong reason was lately put forward by inquirers into the matter, and that cause is the constant emigration of almost all the strong, sound youth of Ireland, male and female. Is it strange that, in face of this sad state of things, many should look with a jealous eye at the throngs of young men and women, mostly of the peasant class, who stand gazing eagerly at the beautiful pictures presented to them of life in those 'green hills far away'? Canada is especially represented by an almost endless series of sunny pictures, landscapes, farm scenes, snug homesteads, vast herds of fat cattle, all transparencies so arranged and lighted by artificial light that 'the sun shines always there.' No mention of a life of ghastly isolation; of eight months in the year of deep, impassable snow. No, all is summer, all is sunny, all is sociability in these charming pictures; you almost hear the song of the happy milkmaids. Why, in this Canada in Ireland there is a lovely picture, all in butter: trees of butter, houses of butter, all wreathed in climbing roses of butter; veritable buttercups sprinkle the meadows—oh! it would all just melt in your mouth, and you want to go off to that land of milk and honey right away. But alas, poor Ireland! Ah! those cows afar, those cows afar! Thoughtful people, who love to think of what might be here at home, turn from it all, and especially from the throng of gazing peasants, with a sore pang at heart.

And so there are no congratulations going round over the great Irish International Exhibition of 1907. The guarantors are quaking in their shoes; city hotel and restaurant keepers are muttering ugly words; foreign exhibitors tell us they have done little or no business, even purchasers of pretty toys are not pleased for they frequently find, a day too late, that the very same articles are to be had considerably cheaper in Grafton Street. It is whispered that £30,000 are lost to the guarantors. Let us hope not, for few of them could afford to lose much. A project is on foot to keep on the exhibition for another year. The scheme is started by a syndicate of new men who hope, the buildings being already provided, to make a sufficient sum to pay off the deficit of the present year and have a good overplus in their own pockets.

A Public Park.

Before leaving the subject of the exhibition, I may remark that the extensive and now prettily laid-out grounds are a gift to the citizens and are to be kept up as a public park. The giver is Lord Pembroke, the wealthy lord of the soil, the richest township in Dublin. The park is called Herbert Park, from the family name of the Pembrokes. The history of this township is a curious one and when you have heard it you will say that the owner may well give a corner of it to the citi-

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