

Irish News.

OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)
Dublin, March, 1902.

Irish Language Movement.

The latest dispensation of our rulers comes to us in a positively astounding form. You all know, or at least all the Irish amongst you know, that for many centuries a strenuous effort was made to root out of the Irish people their religion and their nationality.

One of the most effective means of clouding over all nationality and religion in a people is to take from them the language in which their fathers spoke and in which their mothers taught them to pray. With the Irish this was an especially efficacious means, because, of all races in the world, the Irish were a people who kept alive their history and their traditional knowledge by means of spoken teachings. A few words as to the method of this will show how knowledge was thus kept alive and could be kept alive, even were there not thousands of scribes ever busied with the keeping of those records which, so early as twelve centuries ago, foreign invaders began to destroy, with a purpose.

In olden times, the kingdoms of Ireland were divided and subdivided, and these subdivisions again parcelled into districts, every single division, sub-division, and district of which had its own special chronicler whose education for this duty obliged him to train his memory so that he had by heart a vast store of historical lore, quite distinct from his purely poetic lore. At certain stated intervals, all these historians met, went over together their old store of knowledge and their chronicles of all notable events that had taken place since the last assembly, compared notes, corrected inaccuracies, and perfected their records. Moreover, these chronicles that were to be committed to memory were, for the most part, if not entirely, in verse, and for a very wise reason we may be slipshod in repeating a prose work and inaccuracies would thus slip in unintentionally, but in verse this could scarcely occur. Thus were handed down intact, in the Irish language, the history, the genealogies, the traditions of our race, and hence, when we were to be forced to forget the religion and the history of our fathers, the language, of all things, must go, every means—punishment, ridicule, deprivation of education, all were employed to root it out, with the natural consequence that amongst the educated classes, particularly amongst the dwellers in towns, it practically died. But it was never correct to say that Irish was a dead language there survived, there hung through all to the mother tongue no less than a quarter of a million of Irish-speaking people in the four provinces.

The Irish language has one peculiarity over every other tongue, perhaps a blessing St Patrick left with it. Although its grammar is very difficult and it is rich in idioms, yet, though it was made penal to learn or speak it, our poor peasantry of to-day speak almost as pure, as correct grammar as if they had all along been taught by the most careful and competent teachers. They cannot tell why they do it, no more than this Spring's young blackbird can tell how it is he trills the same notes his parent warbled last year, but certain it is that the peasant who cannot read a word of Irish, the little boy or girl from the far away Dingle promontory speaks Irish, makes the difficult changes of aspiration and ellipsis, of person, mood, and tense in Irish as many a wealthy middle-class Englishman cannot do in English.

Now, we all know that if we want to learn a foreign language and if we wish to speak that language as the natives of its country speak it, we go for a year or two into that country and study the idioms, the intonations, the very voices of its people; or, if we cannot do this, we take pains to find out a native of the land and learn from him how he speaks his own tongue. And still, those who have the good fortune to study in foreign lands know that even by learning from the best teacher obtainable at home, we can make but a poor attempt. Well, the Penal Laws being mostly in abeyance, the Irish are once again at liberty to go to school and to learn their own tongue, and so began twenty-five years ago that movement which has stirred our very hearts, the movement to regain that which was lost to so many of us. How well I remember hearing the learned Dr. R. R. Madden, author of the 'Lives of the United Irishmen,' say: 'I would give all the foreign languages I know to be able to speak my native tongue.'

The people were so earnest and so persistent in their efforts to obtain a recognition of the Irish language from the Commissioners of National Education and from the Intermediate Education Board that the Government were obliged to yield a reluctant consent, to permit the language to be placed amongst subjects for examination, and to appoint native scholars as examiners, one of these examiners being the Very Rev. Dr. Hickey, of Maynooth. But the movement is looked on with disfavor by a certain class of anti-Catholics, for our clergy are in it, heart and soul, and so it is to be discountenanced by every possible means. What is the latest step taken to discourage the people and turn them away from their present earnest efforts to learn their native tongue? The Board of Intermediate Education announces that for the future foreigners are to be appointed as examiners in the Irish language! A German professor, who may be able to read ancient Irish, but of a certainty could not follow a conversation amongst native speakers, has been invited over and has been appointed examiner in Gaelic to the student who cannot understand him and whom he cannot understand, and our Irish professors are ordered to stand aside. Of course the obvious motive for this move is so to disgust the people that they may, one and all, refuse to present themselves for examination, that the schools (to which the results of said examination are of considerable value) may cease to include Irish in their curriculum, and that the newly-awakened enthusiasm of students may thus be discouraged and die out. There may also be behind the move that spirit of which I spoke some time ago as a danger, that school of agnostics who secretly sought to use the education movement in order to work mischief amongst our growing generation, but who see their aims thwarted by the presence of the Catholic clergy, who are everywhere foremost in the work, guiding and leading, where it is wise to lead onwards, checking, where it is necessary to check.

The eve of St. Patrick's Day was this year made the occasion for promoting the national desire to revive our language. Patrickmas, as the old people call the time, is henceforth to be 'Irish Language Week' and on the 16th met a magnificent procession through Dublin marked the opening of this new era. Throughout that and the following days, collections were made in the city and suburbs to meet the expenses of publishing books and providing native (not made in Germany) teachers, and the result has been eminently satisfactory to the organisers of Irish Language Week.

Visit Postponed.

After all, the King and Queen are not coming to Ireland this year,

though some cling to the hope that his Majesty will be so lacking in tact as to run ashore en garcon during the yachting tour he intends taking at Easter. It is scarcely likely he will do this, as it would be the reverse of complimentary, when he has just announced, with careful precision of his wording of the fact, that his Ministers will not allow him to come as King.

It is said openly that the King's visit has been prohibited because we are to have another reign of coercion, the empty prisons—perhaps as a matter of economy and to keep the officials going—are to be filled with political prisoners, and so forth. It is really most comical. There is no crime: one judge of assize after another complains of the farce of bringing juries together, simply to compliment them and send them away, men are actually being taken up on the mere word of a policeman, tried, found not guilty and sent to prison! There is no use in wasting words on the farce that is being played out here to keep up an army of officials and fight the last rally for the landlords.

M.B.

COUNTY NEWS.

SLIGO.—A Verdict Reversed.

The Castle authorities have received another set-back in the decision of Mr. Justice Andrews in the case of Hickie, a police sergeant, who claimed £500 for damages on account of injuries received while he was engaged in preventing Mr. John O'Donnell, M.P., from addressing his constituents at Kilmaine last October. When Sergeant Hickie first made his claim County Court Judge Danc awarded him the sum claimed, and directed that it should be levied off Mr. O'Donnell's constituency. But on appeal Justice Andrews has reversed that decision, holding that the Sergeant in trying to gag John O'Donnell was not engaged 'in the discharge of his duty as a police officer bringing a disturber to justice,' as he would require to have been to come within the provision of the Act.

GENERAL.

Temperance Movement.

Not since the days of Father Mathew (writes a Dublin correspondent) has the temperance movement occupied so prominent a position in Ireland as it does to-day, nor has it been pushed forward with such zeal and energy. It is the leading topic of the hour and bids fair to revolutionise the social habits of the people, habits that are so detrimental to their welfare, both temporal and eternal. To the Irish hierarchy as a body and to the bishops and priests in their individual capacities this blessed change is almost entirely due. The Maynooth Resolutions, the Lenten Pastorals, and the spirited action of many ecclesiastics like the Bishop of Galway, have done their work and done it well. This is evident to the merest tyro, yet we have people who never did anything to forward the cause ostentatiously calling upon the clergy to do their part, among the rest Lord Chief Justice O'Brien, who expressed a pious wish to that effect at the opening of the Assizes in Tralee.

Cromwell in Ireland.

Sir William Butler lectured recently before the Irish Literary Society of London on 'The Cromwellian War in Ireland.' It had, Sir William said, been the effort of the writers of the last fifty years to minimise the Drogheda massacre, but the evidence of unmitigated atrocity was too strong and it would stand for all time as one of the bloodiest landmarks along the long road of human guilt.

Thanks from English Miners.

The Irish Nationalist party have received the following resolution