

A GREAT IRISH ASTRONOMER

Another interesting book of the week is the *Reminiscences and Letters of Sir Robert Ball*, edited by his son, Mr. Valentine Ball (writes the London correspondent of the *Advocate*). The genial, witty, and learned Hibernian astronomer—one of the most delightful of the many lecturers I have heard at both ends of the earth—had only partially written his recollections when he passed away, but he had compiled a considerable collection of notes and documents for future use. This material his son has turned to excellent account, and the combined result is a most readable and entertaining volume. Sir Robert Ball came from a family long associated with the town of Youghal—locally pronounced like 'yawl.' His parents intended him for the Church, but the fates decreed that the study of the stars should be his vocation in life. He says:—'Shortly after leaving school I was given a copy of an introduction to astronomy by Mitchell, which is known by the name of *The Orbs of Heaven*. I well remember sitting up to the small hours of the morning devouring this book. It delighted me, as few books have ever done, before or since.' By and by he was asked to become tutor to the sons of Lord Rosse, who had just set up his great telescope: 'I saw in this letter an opportunity for studying astronomy under the very best auspices. I also realised that acceptance of this post would enable me to become acquainted with scientific things and with leading men of science. In framing my reply, I explained that my classics, to put it mildly, were very shaky, but that I would do my best.' This decided his fate, for it put him definitely on the road of being an astronomer, and he tells us that when he began studying the heavens through Lord Rosse's telescope:—'Nothing amazed me so much as the extraordinary speed with which the hours passed. A look at my watch might show it was half-past 8. When I next drew it from my pocket, at what seemed no great interval of time, it would show half past 11. On a third occasion I would find it ten minutes to 2: I sometimes followed Herschel's strenuous example, and remained observing from dusk to dawn.'

Sir Robert Ball's fame as an astronomer in Ireland and the most popular writer of books on the science of the stars led to his appointment to the Chair of Astronomy in the University of Cambridge—a dignified post, which he occupied until the end of his life. It gave him a good deal of leisure for lecturing, and during the winter season he was in constant demand in that capacity, invariably drawing crowded audiences, to whom he expounded the wonders of the heavens in lucid, popular language and with a raucy, musical, Hibernian brogue. While holding the office of Royal Astronomer in Dublin, he had an intimate friend and congenial companion in the witty Father Healy, parish priest of Bray, concerning whom Sir Robert remarks: 'One servant cooked the dinner and brought it to table. No one could divine how the guests were waited on. The attendance appeared to provide itself in some way or other. It used to be said that on one occasion an officer of the Guards looked round for a servant to take his coat and hat when he entered the house, but the host came forward and said to him: "You know those footmen of mine all gave notice and left on the spot when they heard you were coming." Father Healy was always ready with an appropriate answer. Thus, when some busybody asked whether a friend of his was a good Catholic, the reply was, "No better man, but a child could beat him at fasting."'

There are numerous good stories in the book. One of the best relates to a man who, being about to set up house on one of the islands of the west, employed the local boatman to convey his furniture and effects from the mainland. When the boat, heavily laden, was approaching the jetty, the following colloquy took place:

'Have you got it all there, Pat?'
'We have, yer honor.'
'But where's the grand piano?'
'Sure, we're towing it behind.'

Except on a few rare occasions, including a visit to Dartmoor—where he began an astronomy lecture to the convicts with a funny story about a policeman who promised to 'keep his eye on' an eclipse—Sir Robert invariably refused to lecture for nothing. Replying to one applicant for his free services, he wrote:—'I certainly do often lecture in England, but then, it is always on behalf of a certain married lady with five children, who is solely dependent upon her husband for support.'

CATHOLIC FEDERATION

(From our Christchurch correspondent.)

After devotions in the Cathedral on last Sunday evening, Mr. Girling Butcher, general secretary and organiser of the Catholic Federation, addressed a large number of the parishioners in the Hibernian Hall, kindly lent and furnished for the occasion. Among those present were the Rev. Dr. Kennedy, Rev. Fathers Murphy, B.A., and Long. Councillor J. R. Hayward (vice-president of the Diocesan Council) presided. Mr. Girling-Butcher spoke at length on the lines of his previous addresses, evidently greatly interesting and instructing his audience. A very hearty vote of thanks to the speaker was moved in eloquent terms by Mr. M. Grimes (secretary of the H.A.C.B. Society), which was seconded by Mr. M. O'Brien, and carried by acclamation.

A pleasing feature of the meeting was a stirring little speech given by Mr. Consedina, a visitor from Melbourne, on the activities of the Catholic Federation in Victoria. His remarks were listened to with marked attention and were greatly appreciated.

DOMINION EXECUTIVE.

(From our Wellington correspondent.)

The Dominion Executive held its usual meeting in the new offices, St. Patrick's Hall, last Wednesday evening. Mr. J. A. L. Burke presided, and there were present: Rev. Father Hurley, S.M., Adm. (hon. treasurer), Messrs. T. Forby, L. T. Reibel, W. F. Johnson, and P. D. Hoskins (assistant hon. secretary). A large amount of routine business was disposed of, and the report of the Dominion Council in respect to the list of disabilities which that body required prepared was taken in hand. The organizer's report disclosed satisfactory results in the Christchurch diocese. In the course of a discussion it was pointed out that it was utterly impossible to accede to the demands of parish committees to arrange for the organiser to visit their respective districts on a Sunday, as such arrangements precluded him from covering the ground in sufficient time to allow of a visit to other dioceses where his services are so much needed. The need of donations for the Trencham Catholic Hall, erected by the Federation, was discussed, and it was decided to write to the diocesan councils requesting them to forward their promised quota.

ITEMS OF SPORT

FOOTBALL.

In first grade Rugby in Dunedin on Saturday, University (8 points) beat Zingari-Richmond (nil), Port Chalmers (6 points) beat Union (nil). Other matches were abandoned owing to the inclemency of the weather. In the Association contests, High School Old Boys played a drawn game with Ravensbourne (1 goal each). As the Christian Brothers could not muster a full team they abandoned their match with Northern.

ST. JOSEPH'S HARRIERS, DUNEDIN.

The St. Joseph's, St. Kilda, and Cargill Road Methodist Harriers held a combined run from the Methodist Schoolroom, Wesley street, on Saturday. After the run, the St. Joseph's and St. Kilda Clubs were the guests at tea of the Cargill Road Club. Captain O'Farrell (St. Joseph's) and Captain Govan (St. Kilda) thanked the Cargill Road Club for the enjoyable time spent.