

## AN INTERESTING CEREMONY.

Blessing the Flocks and Herds.

Those who have lived among the people in the country and rural districts of Ireland, know that at certain seasons of the year the priest or bishop comes around and blesses the homesteads of the people, not even omitting the barns and byres, and haggards, the places where the cattle are housed, and where the produce of the harvest is stacked. The late Archbishop MacHale, of Tuam, County Galway, was constant in these attentions to the poor people. He also blessed the boats and nets of the fishermen, and why not? The Redeemtorists, too, at our own doors, up at Mott Haven, when they visit their parishioners, bless their homes, beginning at the basements and going up over the entire building. This is a beautiful and devout Catholic practice. At missions we see the people bring to church their pictures, statues, bibles, books of devotion, rosaries, etc., to have them blessed.

In view of these holy and necessary practices, the reader will understand the following beautiful description of Mass being said to call down the blessing of God upon the flocks and herds in some parts of Catholic France. The same ceremonies prevail elsewhere as the following indicates:—

The most poetical ceremony that I have ever witnessed is the so-called *Messe des Animaux*, which takes place every year on New Year's Eve in the French Department of the Cevennes or the "Black Espinouse." The scenery of these superb mountains, which in itself is extremely romantic, lends a peculiar charm to this simple and truly pastoral festival, given in honor of the herds of cattle which constitute the greatest riches of the inhabitants. The churches in those comparatively wild regions are generally few and far between, and are built often on high rocks overlooking arid plains where there are many poor villages, one church and one humble priest doing duty for several of these hamlets. To spend New Year's in the Cevennes is to be suddenly transported from our nineteenth century civilization to the times of the early Christian era; for customs, costumes—nay, even the simple, unaffected faith of those bygone days—are preserved to a surprising degree by the mountaineers of that region.

I shall never forget the impression created on my mind by the scene which presented itself to my enraptured eyes on the New Year's Eve when, accompanied by some friends who possessed a hunting lodge in the Espinouse, I stood under the portico of the tiny little gray stone church and watched with keen interest the flocks being led up the steep incline toward the plateau whereon the modest edifice is built. The church was a poor little, tumble down place, with lichen grown walls and a square, ungraceful steeple, the cracked bell of which was tolling frantically. The inner decorations, thoroughly in keeping with the outside of this mountain chapel, consisting of crude, almost primitive paintings and of a set of high wooden candlesticks and some earthen vases filled with pine branches, which stood on the altar. The edifice was crowded with stalwart mountaineers, clad in their festive attire, each of them holding a lighted candle of coarse, yellow wax, glimmering like tiny stars, and every man and woman singing the Cevenol hymn beginning with these words:

Nei pus belo que lon chour.  
(Night more beautiful than day).

In the meantime column after column of cattle advanced toward the church, and, marshalled by their drivers, took their places in long files on the frozen turf in front of the wide open portico. They approached slowly, ponderously and solemnly, with a quasi bewildered expression at being turned out of their warm stables to face the bitter coldness of the bleak December night. The oxen came first, followed by the cows, sheep and goats in a continuous stream, and the rays of the full moon which glittered high above us, over the dark slopes of the mountains shone on the long, polished horns and tawny hides of this strange congregation. Mass was celebrated with the customary pomp by the Cure, a white haired and very venerable man, who appeared almost majestic in his heavy brocaded vestments which must have been several hundred years old.

When he at last had spoken the usual "Ita missa est," indicating that the

sacred ceremony was over, instead of retiring to the vestry he once more lifted the Host from the altar and, followed by the entire congregation he marched towards the portals chanting the "Magnificat" as he went. Upon reaching the steps of the church the old priest halted and holding the sacred Host high above his head pronounced some words of benediction in a low but emphatic voice. The drivers and shepherds all fell upon their knees and with bowed heads murmured the responses, while an acolyte, armed with a holy water sprinkler, walked through the ranks of the now bellowing cattle sprinkling them with the holy fluid. Whether the animals realized the solemnity of the occasion or not, all those which had hitherto been lying down arose to their feet, as if to listen to the short but impressive allocution addressed to the drivers by the venerable Cure.

"My children," he said, "God, in His goodness and mercy, sends His unworthy servant here to bless your flocks, so that, according to an ancient custom of our mountains, the animals which help you to live should be associated in the religious rejoicings heralding the advent of a new year. Let us therefore sing together a loud hosanna in praise of the Lord, who is ever so merciful and lenient to us poor sinners."

Like a peal of thunder the grand melody echoed from hill to hill in the clear night air, sung by hundreds of throats, and rolled majestically to the very confines of the horizon. The startled animals bellowed louder and united their powerful voices to the concert. It was grand and weird beyond description.

As the last note died away the cortege began to move, the priest re-entering the church while the animals slowly wended their way towards the valley in the same order they had come. I followed them with my eyes, much impressed by this festival, so beautiful in its simplicity, and it was only when the last little bleating lamb had left the grassy court before the church that I consented to join my friends who were preparing to drive home.

Throughout the remainder of that night, during the superb supper served at the chateau, and even later in the seclusion of my own apartments, I seemed to still hear the sound of this sublime hosanna, and to see the aged mountain priest as he blessed the herds with the fervent solemnity of his simple, faithful mind, and to-day after many years I cannot recall without emotion the remembrance of this St. Sylvester night in the Black Espinouse.—*N. Y. Catholic Review*.

## ANCIENT IRISH PAINTING.

In these days, when so much attention is being given to all branches of decorative painting, it is of interest to know that there still remains traces of very early paintings in many of the ruined edifices of Ireland, says Mr. Michael J. C. Buckley, in the Freeman's Journal and National Press. Amongst others, we have lately remarked faint traces of decorative painting on the walls of the ancient chapel of St. Cormac on the Rock of Cashel. These walls are now most miserably mildewed and stained green with excessive damp, the result of the neglect from which this venerable chapel now suffers. In the small square apse are three arcades which are finely plastered; the plaster is only an eighth of an inch thick, like all medieval plastering. On the surface of this plastering are still seen outlines of three figures which were evidently executed in either water or wax "fresco," as described by Theophilus, of Mount Athos, in his book on painting.\* I consider these three figures to have been those of Christ the Redeemer and SS. Patrick and Bridget. On the side walls are outlines of a pattern showing the Irish "fret," similar in treatment to the Japanese "key" pattern of the same class. The mouldings and sculptured heads, as well as the capitals, show signs of having been coated with "Gesso," which was gilded and relieved in colors. The walls of this chapel when decorated, as it must have been, were of the richest, warmest, and most superb effect. In the fourteenth century chancel of the cathedral the walls still retain many portions of the rich red "fresco" color. Lines of "Ashlar" work seem to have been traced in white on this red ground. The writer has also remarked painting in the now ruined "Scriptorium," or writing-room, in the quaint little abbey of Darinis at Ballynatray, on the Blackwater.

Penetrating through the dense jungle

of nettles and elder bushes growing in rank luxuriance in this once busy seat of learning (of which many books are now in the library of Salzburg), there appeared on the walls of a protected corner the same red color, with white Ashlar lines thereon; that is to be seen at Cashel. It may be of interest to mention that the windows of the Scriptorium were broad and well lit, and their sills show traces of writing boards, on which these monks of old produced illuminations, ornamentation of the Holy Scriptures, and philosophical works, which are the admiration of all ages.

This writing-room was also most pleasantly situated, being turned towards the south, and commanding a most exquisite view of the lovely river Avon-Dhuy. We trust that attention will be given to any similar traces of early Irish painting that may still be found to remain in other buildings through the country. †

\*This book contains receipts for painting on glass, wood, etc., as used in Roman and mediæval times, from very early periods.

† Called also Molans Abbey, after the name of its founder, St. Molannde, who lived here A. D. 501. This abbey was dissolved in the year 1585.

‡ I am informed that there are traces of similar decorative work at Moyne Abbey, near Killala, and also at Rosserik Abbey, which is a few miles distant from Moyne.

## THE IRISH CRISIS.

## DUTY OF THE HOME RULE MEMBERS.

An Able Article, Based Upon Mr. Stevenson's Paper in the Westminster Review, from the Boston Republic.

The Tory-Unionist partisans in England, and in Ireland, too, are viewing with feelings of satisfaction the parliamentary situation, and chuckling with glee over the prospective defeat of the ministry on the home rule bill. The majority is too slight, they say, to keep a government in power. Disasters must come, and come soon, which will force a dissolution. Of course the wish is parent to the thought. But while we may contemplate with reasonable serenity the outlook for home rule, there is no blinking out of sight the real facts of the case. Nine Irish members are not to be relied upon. The followers of Mr. John Redmond may, unfortunately, be found in opposition at some critical stage of the proceedings. Then there is the defection of Sir Edward Reed, a Liberal member from Wales. Will he be able to control any votes beside his own? Should these two elements develop strength enough to make a demonstration in force they would wipe out the Gladstone majority and compel another appeal to the country. But we have no serious apprehensions upon this score. The people of Great Britain have given their mandate to Parliament, and even though the majority is small, it is sufficiently large to indicate the sentiment and temper of the electorate.

In the Westminster Review for January, Mr. Francis Seymour Stevenson, M.P., discusses this question very intelligently and conservatively. He draws a sharp comparison between the present situation and that which confronted the Melbourne ministry of 1835. Lord Melbourne had less than forty majority in the Commons and an adverse majority of 100 in the House of Lords. Then, as now, the vital question was the Irish question. Notwithstanding the narrowness of the margin in the Lower House, the government lasted from 1835 to 1841. Daniel O'Connell was a force in politics then; he demanded certain reforms for Ireland. These were pledged by the Liberal ministers, and Lords Grey, Brougham and Althorp seceded. They joined the opposition just as Hartington and Chamberlain have done in protest against the proposal to grant a reasonable measure of justice to Ireland. Yet Lord Melbourne stood his ground for six years and carried on the government.

Mr. Stevenson is not troubled by the pronounced opposition of the Lords to home rule, nor by the smallness of the majority in the Commons. He is not disposed to believe that the House of Peers will attempt to do what their predecessors did in 1835—openly defeat measures approved by the representatives of the people. He points out the significant fact that the right of suffrage was somewhat limited and contracted in 1835. The people then had little voice in the direction of public affairs, and they looked on with indifference upon a

contest between the two Houses. "The progress of democratic ideas, and the widening of the electoral basis have," writes Mr. Stevenson, "supplied the progressive legislator of the present day with a leverage which was not at the command of his predecessors in case of a diverge of views between the two chambers, and at the present time the instinct of self-preservation would, in all probability, be sufficient to prevent a repetition of the tactics adopted by the House of Lords under the guidance of Lord Lyndhurst. It is true that the threats of resistance are numerous and undisguised, but it is equally true that there is no lack of motive power to set these threats at defiance."

The purposes in the minds of the electors when the present House of Commons was chosen were well defined. There could be no doubt as to the issues involved in the canvass. Mr. Stevenson emphasizes this point when he says:

"For seven years the home rule controversy has been carried on in the press and on the platform; the arguments on either side have penetrated into every nook and corner of the land; full opportunity has been afforded, under the late government, for watching the nature and effects of the alternative method of dealing with Ireland; and the outcome is that the country has shown that it is almost in favor of the general principle of home rule as it is in favor of the general principle of free trade, and that, through the operation of the change of feeling which has taken place in England and Scotland, it has returned to power a majority and a ministry pledged to do justice to Ireland by according to it the management of what parliament shall decide to be distinctly and specifically Irish affairs. Short of a referendum—a method unknown to the British constitution—no better method of ascertaining the state of public feeling on a question of great moment could have been devised. No issue presented to the electors was ever fought out with greater keenness, certainly the question of the disestablishment of the Irish church, which was at stake during the election of 1868, was never submitted to the country with the same degree of fullness."

It would be a crime for any friend of Ireland to precipitate another election upon the people after the clear statement of the issues made to the electors the last campaign and after they had approved the same. No pretence of lofty patriotism can justify the jeopardizing of the country's interests and the sacred cause of home rule until the Irish people shall emphatically reject the Liberal proposals. We anticipate the introduction as a fairly liberal measure by the Gladstone government. This should be supported generously by the Home Rulers of all shades.

Amendments, of course, will be in order. The principal will be sustained. Continuous attendance at the sittings of the House, persistent watchfulness at all times, will be necessary on the part of the Irish representatives. A solid phalanx, determined to win justice for their country and their race, can work wonders even when the party majority is small. Patriotism, devotion to principle and loyalty to the cause are the qualities most needed.

HUSBAND: Did you drive all those nails yourself? Wife: Yes I did. Husband: Let me see your hands. Wife: Here they are—not hurt a bit, Husband: Hum! Who held the nails?

"I FELL into the pond to-day, and it was up to my neck," said Walter. "Nonsense," said Jack, "the water in the pond isn't more than a foot deep." "Oh, but I went in head first," said Walter.

"WHAT did you do with the ball?" "It went over the fence into Mr. Brown's yard." "Did you go after it?" "No, sir." "Why not?" "Because it went through the window."

HE HAD THE MATERIAL.—Weary novelist: Heigho! My brains seem to be wool-gathering this morning. His wife: Then I suppose your next story will be full of "padding?"

WHICH are the two letters in the English alphabet most disagreeable to ladies? D-K—decay.

WHY is a man who deals in stale jokes like a stock jobber? Because he depends on fun-dead property.