

OUR CURBSTONE OBSERVER

On "The Marchelsea."

ET no person become worried; I am not going to tell the story of the famous Marchelsea—the Debtor's Prison—that Dickens, in his "Little Dorrit" so admirably described and so much aided in its abolition. The idea of the Marchelsea flashed through my mind when I learned of a certain case that created some comment a week or so ago. And whenever that idea arises it is always accompanied with the companion idea of the absurdity of such an institution. When the British Parliament abolished the debtors' prison and imprisonment for debt, it took a step along the highway of modern development. Yet, strange as it may seem, we would appear to be still in need of a Marchelsea. I will tell in a few words the story of the case in point.

A STRANGE CASE.—A man owed a small sum of money—four dollars. Being unable, through pressing difficulties, to pay the amount at once, he was sued. The action being taken against him he was ordered to appear in court on a given day. On his way to obey that summons he fell ill and was unable to reach the court. He was found guilty of contempt of court and arrested therefor. The consequence was a condemnation to prison until he should satisfy that debt. It was for contempt of court that he was condemned; but actually it was his inability to pay the sum required that kept him several weeks in prison. Morally, at least, there was no contempt of court, since his failure to appear was involuntary on his part. Therefore we must conclude that he was sent to jail for debt. It is not necessary to follow this special case any further, particularly in its sad and almost tragic sequence; but it will suffice to illustrate the idea of a modern Marchelsea.

AN IRISHMAN'S VIEW.—Of all the Irish poets perhaps none was more pathetic than Richard Dalton Williams, yet none had a keener perception of the humors of life. When he was convulsing the readers of the "Nation" with his "Misadventures of a Medical Student," he took occasion to have a fling at the custom of imprisonment for debt. "In his lines under the heading: 'Quod' he gives us a pretty fair specimen of his wit as well as a good sample of common sense. Having described himself as being arrested for a debt contracted in a public house, and having set forth his unique plea in a most humorous manner he finally says:—

"They listened to my eloquence; But, yet, 'tis very odd, They sent me ignominiously, The savages, to quod."

"Quod" was the slang term for the prison that was in vogue in Dublin some fifty years ago).

"Adieu 'St. Vincent's,' 'Dun's,' 'The Meath,'

Obstetrical diameters; I'm left alone in quod, to groan, Or howl my own hexameters, And muse upon a law like this, So dolorously funny, That takes away my liberty, Because I haven't money. I could work before they quodded me,

But devil a thing at all Can a body do in prison, But apostrophise this wall, Yet, as I ever like to have A little quiet fun, I sat me down with in my cell, And (having first begun To curse the Court Insolvent For refusing my petition), I projected up the chimney A Vesuvius of sedition; I came it very strong, And then I sang extempore A treasonable song, Particularly landing, In the chorus of my lays, A pyrotechnic plan to set The Liffey in a blaze. And now I'm hoping constantly— I trust not without reason— To be put upon my trial, For sedition and high treason, And thus at once win martyrdom And Richmond country air. By means of 'a delusion, A mockery and a snare."

MORE SENSE THAN WIT.—It seems to me that these lines, taken

ed off in a jovial moment, contain something far deeper than mere humor. The poet found himself in prison, and very wisely called the law a funny one that deprived him of the liberty necessary to earn that for the lack of which he was punished. Then there is the idea of singing treasonable songs, for the purpose of being put on trial for sedition so as to be condemned to pass sometime at Richmond Bridge. The absurdity of the whole situation suddenly dawns upon us, and we can see through the mockery of the poet, a picture of the real situation in Ireland, when to whistle a certain air, or sing a certain song, was sufficient to have you arrested, tried, condemned and possibly transported. But, if the treasonable portion of the satire is no longer applicable in our day, at least we have still examples of the imprisonment for debt. And we have, even in this city, only too many cases of willfully breaking the law in order to secure the benefit of the punishment. Have we not seen, as the winter came on, numbers flocking to the police courts and begging to be sent to prison for the winter months? They prefer the safety and shelter of the prison to the exposure and dangers of a homeless life outside. We have seen honest people go into stores and openly steal some trifles, get themselves arrested, plead guilty, and thereby secure a few months of protection from the terrors of the winter. Deep down in the heart of such a person there was no dishonesty; the act was really not a theft; but there was no other means whereby the desired imprisonment could be obtained—and to fail in securing a condemnation might possibly have meant starvation, cold, and maybe death. Others have broken windows, or performed like acts of violence, not through viciousness, but simply as a sole means of salvation. Is not this, in another sphere, exactly what Williams' "Medical Student" did—to sing unnecessarily treasonable songs in order to get tried and condemned for sedition?

REFLECTIONS.—When we pause, on a day such as some of those that recently came to us, and reflect upon the cold, the hunger, the poverty that totter and shiver past us on the street, and when we consider the intensity of the season as well as the scarcity and fearfully high prices of all kinds of fuel; when we know that numbers outside the prison envy those within its walls, and seek by every possible means to join in their company, and that within those walls are those whose only crime has been a lack of means, due possibly to no fault of their own, but to circumstances beyond their control; when we compare all these notes, and then go out on the curbstone—while the winter blast is abroad and the glass registers 15 or 20 degrees below zero, it is not surprising that we feel vexed with the world and become inclined to find fault with everything—the law included. There is decidedly room for legislation in two directions—the abolition of such savors of the old Marchelsea methods and the establishment of some means whereby the necessity of human beings seeking the shelter of a prison roof may be obviated. I am not sufficient of a legislator to hazard any suggestions; but I can observe what takes place each day, as I go my rounds, and then record the same as information for those who are conversant with the business of making laws. It is very easy for the "fireside philanthropists," the people who have all the comforts and not a few of the luxuries of life, to talk of what should be done and what should be avoided, to criticize the indigent and to tell what they would do if situated in the less fortunate position; but they have no conception of the wrongs that are perpetrated and that are untouched by any remedial law, of the miseries that are endured and for which there is no authorized relief.

A MEMORABLE PASSAGE.—Never do these thoughts come to my mind, whether suggested by the picture of miseries that this season too often paints for the observer, or by actual contact with the ill that haunt the ways of men, that I fail to recall that memorable passage in Thomson's "Winter"—a passage that should be written in gold on the walls of every city.

"Ah! little think the gay licentious proud, Whom pleasure, power, and affluence surround; They who their thoughtless hours in giddy mirth, And wanton, often cruel, riot waste; Ah! little think they, while they dance along, How many feel this very moment death, And all the sad variety of pain. How many sink in the devouring flood, Or more devouring flame. How many bleed, By shameful variance betwixt man and man. How many pine in want, and dungeon-glooms; Shut from the common air, and common use Of their own limbs. How many drink the cup Of baleful grief, or eat the bitter bread Of misery. Sore pierced by wintry winds, How many shrink into the sordid hut Of cheerless poverty. How many shake With all the fiercer tortures of the mind, Unbounded passion, madness, guilt, remorse; Whence tumbled headlong from the height of life, They furnish matter for the tragic muse. Even in vale where Wisdom loves to dwell, With Friendship, Peace, and Contemplation, joined, How many, racked with honest passions, droop In deep-retired distress. How many stand Around the death-bed of their dearest friends, And point the parting anguish. Thought fond man Of these, and all the thousand nameless ills That one incessant struggle render life, One scene of toil, of suffering, and of fate, Vice in his high career would stand appalled, And heedless rambling Impulse learn to think; The conscious heart of Charity would warm, And her wide wish Benevolence dilate; The social tear would rise, the social sigh; And into clear perfection, gradual bliss, Refining still, the social passions work."

In might appear too pointed—and nothing would be farther from my intentions—were I to continue the quotation, and give the next thirty lines of that masterly poem. But, whoever has the advantage of possessing Thompson's "Season" might do worse than turn to his "Winter" and read the continuation of the work.

OUR OTTAWA LETTER

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

Ottawa, Jan. 21.

It would be possible to repeat this week all that was contained in last week's letter concerning the political situation here, in regard to rumors of changes, meeting of Parliament, and all such matters; for, actually there is no change in the situation. I might, however, mention that the name of Mr. G. P. Magann, the well known Irish Catholic contractor, of Toronto, is being strongly mentioned in connection with the Senatorship made vacant by the recent death of Senator O'Donohoe. However, this question, like that of the opening of Parliament, is a matter for consideration in the near future. It seems a pity to have such beautiful winter weather, and to see so much good coal used in the heating of the Buildings, and yet to have no session, to have none of the thousands that might benefit by that heat, were the House only sitting. It looks very dreary here, especially at this season, when the place used formerly to be all life and bustle. But we will make up for that when the summer comes, and no artificial heat will be needed.

A most pleasing event took place here last Saturday, and one in which the Catholics of Montreal are interested. At the Apostolic Delegation, Mgr. Sbarretti received a deputation from the Catholic Sailors' Institute, of Montreal, and was presented with an address of welcome on behalf of that now flourishing institution. Hon. Charles Fitzpatrick, Minister of Justice, headed the de-

putation, which included Mr. F. B. McNamee, president, and Mr. M. A. Phelan, secretary of the institution. After being introduced, Mr. McNamee read the following address, which was handsomely illuminated:

To the Most Rev. Donatus Sbarretti, Archbishop of Ephesus, Apostolic Delegate to Canada:

May it please Your Excellency, — The Catholic Sailors' Club, organized, A.D., 1895, in accordance with the expressed wish of our Holy Father Leo XIII., for the purpose of ministering to the temporal and spiritual welfare of the seamen visiting the port of Montreal, begs to approach Your Excellency with assurances of its loyalty to the supreme head of the Church, whom you so worthily represent.

The club wishes to extend to you a cordial welcome to this Dominion where persons of all classes and creeds enjoy every liberty, civil and religious, and to express the hope that you will, when in the city, honor its home with an approving visit.

That your residence in Canada may be agreeable to you, and that the Almighty may bestow His choicest blessings and favors upon you, is the prayer of Your Excellency's most devoted servants.

(Signed) F. B. McNamee, president; B. McNally, first vice-president; F. L. Green, second vice-president; C. F. Smith, treasurer; M. A. Phelan, secretary.

In his reply, Mgr. Sbarretti gave expression to a deep appreciation of all the sentiments conveyed in the address and hoped to be able always to take an active interest in the good work that the Institute was doing amongst the sea-farers that come to the port of Montreal. He also said that he expected to be able to attend the formal opening of the Institute next spring. This action on the part of the Catholics of Montreal is very widely and favorably commented upon in Ottawa.

One of the pioneer Irish Catholic ladies of this section has gone to her rest, in the person of the late Mrs. Bridget Quirk, relict of the late William Quirk, of Aylmer. She was the mother of Dr. E. L. Quirk, of that place, and possibly the foremost Irish Catholic practitioner in the valley of the Ottawa. Dr. Quirk is a graduate of McGill; a self-made man, in every acceptance of the term, an honor to his nationality and his creed, and one whose loss has awakened a general sentiment of sincere sorrow and sympathy. Under the circumstances, and as the "True Witness" circulates amongst so many of Dr. Quirk's friends, I make no excuse for giving you the following details. On Saturday last the service was held in St. Paul's Church, Aylmer, and was one of the grandest and most impressive ever held in the handsome new edifice and the attendance of an unusually large congregation of relatives and friends from Ottawa, Hull, Quyon and surrounding parts signified the high esteem in which deceased was held by all who knew her. Rev. Father Labelle, parish priest of Aylmer, celebrated the Requiem Mass, in which he was attended by Rev. Father Daymond, of Luskville, as deacon, and Rev. Father Brunet, of the Brook, as sub-deacon. Rev. Fathers Murphy and Dr. O'Boyle, Ottawa University; Carriere of Cantley, Chartrand of Billings' Bridge, Sloan of Bayswater and Fraerie of Vinton also assisted. The decorations and drapings of the Church were most beautiful and these, together with the beautiful flowers and the lights upon the altar, made up a scene that was both magnificent and impressive. A full choir furnished the music, the solos of Mr. Napoleon Mathe, tenor, and Dr. Paquette of Hull, being particularly fine. Rev. Fathers Chartrand and Carriere also sang, and other members of the choir were: Mrs. Bourgeois, Miss McDonald, Miss Devlin, Mr. G. L. Dumouchel, Jr., and Mrs. Lachman. Miss L. McDonald performed the duties of organist. The spiritual offerings were from Rev. Canon Campeau, Archbishop's Palace; Rev. Canon McCarthy, St. Bridget's Church; Rev. Father Laffriere, Dominican; the Rev. Sisters of Aylmer Convent; Rev. Sister Kelly, St. Patrick's Home; Rev. Sister St. Lawrence, St. Anthony's Home; Rev. Sister St. Lawrence and pupils of St. Anthony's Home; Miss Cleot Labelle, Aylmer presbytery; Miss L. Foran, Aylmer; Mrs. G. L. Dumouchel, Aylmer; Mrs. John Ryan, Aylmer; Mrs. John Kinsella, Ottawa; Miss Geary, Ottawa; Miss O'Meara, Ottawa; Miss Minnie Goulden, Ottawa; Miss Minnie Smith, Ottawa; Mrs. Barrie and family, Ottawa. Beautiful and costly offerings were sent from Messrs. John Murphy and Co., Mr. and Mrs. Egan, Ottawa; Mr. and Mrs. F. Fraser, Ottawa. Previous to the fu-

neral hundreds of people called to pay the last tribute of love and respect to the deceased. The interment took place in the Roman Catholic cemetery, Aylmer road, the pallbearers being G. C. Rainboth, ex-mayor; Antoine Perrier, Patrick Kelly, John Laverne, John Ryan, G. L. Dumouchel, sr. The chief mourners were Mrs. T. J. Lyons, Ottawa; Miss Quirk, Aylmer, and Dr. E. L. Quirk, Aylmer.

Hull has been having a lively time in civic circles. After a spirited campaign on Monday, Hull elected Mr. Gendron over Mr. Labelle, N.P. Mr. Gendron is a native of Montmorency Falls, Que. He is just forty-seven years of age. In 1876 he took up his residence in Hull, when he accepted the position of overseer for the E. B. Eddy Company. In 1898 he was appointed Crown Timber Agent, a position he still holds. A year ago he was elected member of the City Council. He served on several committees, and gained the confidence of all by his strict business methods. He speaks both languages very fluently. He is a brother-in-law of Premier Parent of Quebec. It is clear that Hull has a level head in municipal selections; for that city has secured a man for mayor, who has vast practical business knowledge, and who is allied in a way, with those political in position to grant favors.

On Tuesday, 27th January, the Premiers of the different provinces will meet here to consult with the Dominion Premier. The resolutions that were passed at the inter-provincial conference, held in Quebec, last month, will be laid before the Federal Government, for consideration. It will be an official interview with the Dominion Government on the matter of increased provincial subsidies, from the central government to those of the provinces. This is a meeting that is calculated to cut out fresh and additional work for the coming session.

Ottawa's City Council has just dealt with two very important questions. The first concerns the supplying of water to suburban municipalities, the second refers to a site for the new civic library. Unlike Montreal, Ottawa's surrounding municipalities all want a supply of city water. By a casting vote of the Mayor—the aldermanic division being 12 to 12—the Council decided that no further permits for water shall be granted to outsiders. Whether this settles the question or not is more than I can say. At least, I think further attempts will be made to induce the city to continue giving water to the suburban towns. The fact is that the city can easily do so and the water supplied is much better than any these outside districts can get for themselves. In the matter of the library sites the city, in favor of a property at the corner of Metcalfe and Maria streets. There has been considerable squabbling going on ever since Carnegie took it into his head to give Ottawa a library. It would be amusing reading for Mr. Carnegie were he peruse all the rows he has created, in various cities, with his donations of libraries.

The collegians were successful in a very interesting game of hockey, which took place on the College rink last Saturday. A team representing the Customs Department, tried conclusions with a seven picked from the students. The match was fast and interesting, and was closely watched by the students, who not only cheered their own players, but applauded the efforts of the visitors. The score was 5 to 3.

It will be remembered that about a year ago the new St. Patrick's Hall, on Maria street, was opened with great demonstration. It was described as a magnificent edifice, and so it is; but when its builders thought that it was large enough to satisfy all demands of the Irish societies for years to come, they did not calculate upon its popularity. The present accommodation is so overtaxed that plans are under consideration. At present the building has a depth of eighty-eight feet and a frontage of forty-five on Maria street. The intention is to build an addition with a depth of thirty-five feet, providing a building with a total depth of one hundred and twenty-three feet. Additional space will be secured for an upper story which will be divided into meeting rooms for societies. The fact that an addition has to be built to the Hall at this early date of its existence speaks volumes for the success of the institution, and it may well be added that it speaks volumes in favor of the Irish societies of Ottawa. The Ministerial Association held a meeting here last Monday. In the rooms of the Y.M.C.A. The object of the session was to discuss "The formation of a Council of Federated

Churches." It is most remarkable, in view of the lengthy addresses that were delivered, how so many Protestant bodies are seeking for union, for federation, for unity; and yet none of them seem to be at all able to see that there exists only one possible way of union in religion. They shun the idea of taking the Catholic Church, with its undeniable unity of centuries, as a model, much less of uniting with that only possessor of a Divine and Universal Charter. The world is exceedingly strange; men seek that which they ever fail to find, and persist in refusing to accept it when offered to them.

The Study of Irish History

TO
THE
EDITOR
OF
THE
TRUE
WITNESS.

Dear Sir,—In your edition of Saturday last I was pleased with an article from an occasional contributor on the subject of the teaching of Irish history in the schools. Needless to say that such a study is a duty on the part of those who take an interest in the grand old land. I was very much surprised, however, to observe that your contributor, although writing I presume from our own city, does not seem to be aware of the fact that Irish history is not only taught in our Catholic High School, but that it is a subject of special care and attention. Most of your readers are, I am sure, already aware that a patriotic Irishman in Montreal has founded the prize for Irish history. This prize is awarded every year after a written and an oral examination. The boy obtaining the largest number of marks is presented with a gold watch. The Irish history prize excites the greatest emulation, more perhaps than any other competition. Let us hope that the contribution of your correspondent will awaken the authorities in other places to the necessity of taking up this study. It has a double advantage. In the first place, it teaches the boy who is of Irish parentage the reason why he should love the land of his forefathers. Secondly, it awakens a desire to study history in general. The boy who masters Irish history will wish to know something of the history of other countries. No study is better calculated to develop the mind.

A few Sundays ago it was with heartfelt pleasure that the parishioners of St. Patrick's learned from the Rev. Martin Callaghan, P. P., that our Catholic High School is growing daily in popular favor. Let us hope that it may continue to give us good boys well versed in general knowledge whose minds and hearts have been improved and elevated by a thorough study of the "Story of Ireland."

A CONSTANT READER.

P.S.—If you will permit me I wish to say how much all your well wishers appreciate the marked improvement in the "True Witness." It is one of the most interesting and instructive amongst our Catholic publications. May God bless you in your good work. I enclose you a subscription for another admirer in a far distant land.

C. R.

There are some triumphant defeats of which Victory herself might be jealous.

FRANK J. CURRAN,

M.A., B.O.L.

ADVOCATE.

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