

Irish National Art.

BY "CRUX."

HIS week, according to promise, I will give the balance of the essay which was commenced in last issue, on National Art. It will be remembered that I closed at that point when Davis tells us (1843) that "Cork possesses a gallery of the finest casts in the world." This may seem a peculiar statement and have, for some the air of an exaggeration; but it is nothing of the kind. Just follow on for a few paragraphs and you will soon see that extent is not as important a choice in the formation of a useful gallery. The essayist thus explains.

These casts are not very many—117 only; but they are perfect, and embrace the greatest works of Greek art. They are placed in a dim and dirty room—more shame to the rich men of Cork for leaving them so—but there they are, and there studied Forcé, and Maelise, and the rest, until they learned to draw better than any moderns, except Cornelius and his living brethren.

In the countries where art is permanent there are great collections, Tuscany and Rome for example. But, as we have said before, the highest service done by success in art is not in the possession, but in the creation of great works, the spirit, labor, sagacity, and instruction, receded by the artists to succeed, and flung out by them on their country like rain from sunny clouds.

Indeed, there is some danger of a traditional mediocrity following after a great epoch in art. Superstition of style, technical rules in composition, and all the pedantry of art, too often fill up the ranks vacated by veteran genius, and of this there are examples enough in Flanders, Spain and even Italy. The schools may, and often do, make men scholastic and ungenial, and art remains as instructor and refiner, but creates no more.

Ireland, fortunately or unfortunately, has everything to do yet. We have had great artists—we have not their works—we own the nativity of great living artists—they live on the Tiber and the Thames. Our capital city has no school of art—no facilities for acquiring it. To be sure there are rooms open in the Dublin Society, and they have not been useless, that is all. But a student here cannot learn anatomy, save at the same expense as a surgical student. He has no great works of art before him, no Pantheon, no Valhalla, not even a good museum or gallery. We think it may be laid down as unalterably true, that a student should never draw from a flat surface. He learns nothing by drawing from the lives of another man—he only mimics. Better for him to draw chairs and tables, bottles and glasses, rubbish, potatoes, cabins, or kitchen utensils, than draw from the lines laid down by other men.

Of these forms of nature which the student can originally consult—the sea, the sky, the earth—we would counsel him to draw from them in the first learning; for though he might afterwards analyze and mature his style by study of works of art, yet, by beginning with nature and his own suggestions, he will acquire a genuine and original style, superior to the finest imitation; and it is hard to acquire a master's skill without his manner.

Were all men cast in a divine mould of strength, and straightness, and gallant bearing, and all women proportioned, graceful, and fair, the artist would need no gallery, at least wherewith to begin his studies. He would have to persuade or snatch his models in daily life. Even then, as art creates greater and simpler combinations than ever exist in fact, he should finally study before the superhuman works of his predecessors. But he has about him here an indifferently made, ordinary, not very clean, nor picturesquely-clad people; though, doubtless, if they had the feeling, dress, and education (for mind beautifies the body) of the Greeks, they would not be inferior, for the Irish structure is of the noblest order.

Time and tide wait for no man; but if they did some men habitually come to Mass after the first Gospel would get there late just the same.

To give him a multitude of fine natural models, to say nothing of ideal works, it is necessary to make a gallery of statues or casts. The statues will come in good time, and we hope, and are sure, that Ireland, a nation, will have a national gallery, combining the greatest works of the Celtic and Teutonic races. But at present the most that can be done is to form a gallery.

OUR OTTAWA LETTER.

(From Our Own Correspondent.)

Ottawa, April 14.

WAS the Easter recess, on the one hand, and the Gagey investigation on the other, it is little wonder that the hush of the present has fallen upon the Parliamentary proceedings at Ottawa. However, there will be a stir this week, but too late for your correspondent to give you any account of it in the present issue. On Thursday the Finance Minister will deliver the Budget Speech, an event long and anxiously awaited, not only by Parliament, but also by the entire country. However, at this writing, there is no possibility of giving any information in that connection, nor even of making a forecast of the proposed changes in the tariff. All one can say is that, be they what they may, they are sure to cause a protracted and warm debate. No matter whether the tariff be lowered or raised, all along the line, or left as it is, or fixed up according to a sliding scale, there is sure to be ample criticism; and that means an opportunity for every man in the House to have his say upon his own pet subject—no matter what that may be.

The oldest legislator in Canada—Senator Wark, of New Brunswick—arrived here to-day to attend the session. Senator Wark was ninety-nine years of age last March, and will consequently be one hundred if he lives to see another session. He has been over sixty years in public life, and is now much healthier and stronger looking than many members of the Senate who are twenty-five years his junior. The Government offered a special car to convey the aged Senator to the scene of his duties, but this he declined saying that he felt perfectly well able to travel as he has always done.

There is a likelihood of much lowering telephone rates in Ottawa this summer. The Canadian Telegraph and Telephone Company is asking for incorporation and for city franchise. It stands to reason that this new company is being opposed by the existing one. But, if it secures what it is asking, there is a certainty that it will prove to be a strong adversary. The men who are in this company have a capital of \$30,000,000 behind them, and they are practical telephone and telegraph men. Mr. Kidd, their solicitor, speaking to your correspondent the other day said:—

"They own and operate companies in several states now and in Pennsylvania and have cut the rate from \$72 to \$22 a year. They are in the telephone business, and know it thoroughly. They have fought the Bell Company before, as every independent company has had to do, and I suppose they are ready to fight the Bell again. At any rate it will not be long before the Canadian Telegraph and Telephone Company will be in a position to offer a service to the city of Ottawa on more advantageous terms than with the Bell franchise."

Last week Ottawa lost one of its most promising and popular young Catholics in the person of Lieut. J. Douglas Graham, of the 43rd regiment. He was only twenty-three years of age. Four weeks ago he was seized with an attack of appendicitis, and after undergoing an operation, he sank rapidly and died. He had been, despite his youth, the organizer of more than one military corps in Ottawa. He was first a trooper in the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards. Then he served in the first contingent in South Africa. He was one of the heroes of Paardeberg. When he returned home he took a commission as lieutenant in the 43rd, and in 1901 he went again to the front. He was in the van of battle at Hart's River. He had been married only some months when death came to him, and cut short a most promising career. In business he was connected with the Queen City Oil Company. The funeral, a military one, took place from St. Patrick's Church to the Catholic cemetery.—R.I.P.

As an idea of how crowded, and over-crowded have become the departmental buildings at Ottawa, I

take the liberty of reproducing the following account of the condition of the new Langevin Block:

"It is a building which first contained lofty and spacious rooms. The loftiness remains but the spaciousness has vanished as snow before the noonday sun. Rooms that were once imposing in their dimensions have been divided by partitions running nearly to the ceiling and over which run gas pipes, electric wires, speaking tubes or anything else that the fancy or taste of the occupants desire. Instead of rooms of fair size and appearance, are seen stalls that are filled with desks, file cases, chairs, dust-covered blue books and documents and men and women. In some of these stalls desks are so crowded together that if the clerk farthest from the door wishes to leave, there is a disturbance of the lot as in the case of the household where there was but one bed for numerous children who had to turn over at the word of command from the eldest.

"To come to particular instances. There are two rooms in an upper floor devoted to the money order branch of the post office department. In one there is a small space reserved for numerous desks and the rest of the room is taken up with file cases reaching to the ceiling. In this room twenty-six people are at work, huddled together in the way they can make most comfortable. The alleys between the cases are so narrow that in the one in which three people were occupied, there was not room for more than one to work to the best advantage. In another room in this branch, a smaller room, there were desks and file cases huddled together and in the interstices sixteen people were working.

One thing that appears to have been lost sight of is the fact that Canada was young when the departmental buildings were erected. The growth of the country necessitates more clerks; more clerks necessitate more desks; the rooms are not elastic and the desks are not small. Then the piling up of records makes file cases necessary. Documents grow in number very rapidly in some branches of the service and tiers on tiers of file cases take up much of the room originally intended for people. Then the ventilation of the building is not sufficient. If a window is opened there is a draft that some of the occupants cannot bear. If it is kept closed there is a breathing over and over again of air that becomes so sedative in its effect that its somnolent properties are noticeable even in some of the most hardened civil servants. The ventilation of the building is a source of constant complaint. Whatever may be said of other buildings, there is little doubt that there are more people working in the Langevin block than was ever intended. It is also stated that the over-crowding and bad ventilation causes so much sickness, especially among the women, that the country is a sufferer through paying for lost time."

S. A. A. A.

The annual meeting of the Shamrock Amateur Athletic Association will be held on Monday next, in the Young Irishmen's L. and B. A. hall, when the reports of the directors and secretary-treasurer will be submitted for the consideration and approval of the members.

The past year has been a very successful one for the Association. The report of the secretary-treasurer will show that the assets are \$46,556.35, and the liabilities to be \$17,593.76, leaving a handsome surplus of \$28,962.59.

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ST. BRIDGET'S NIGHT REFUGE.

Report for week ending Sunday, 12th April, 1908.—Males 226, females 0. Irish 121, French 79, English 23, Scotch and other nationalities 3. Total 226.

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Old Letters.

By a Regular Contributor.)

From 1846 till 1878 the manager of the Clonmel Gas Works, County Tipperary, Ireland, was a Mr. Kearney. He was an intimate friend of Bianconi, who resided, in later years, outside Clonmel. Mr. Kearney had about a dozen boats, on the Suir, which carried coal, coke, and other requisites for the gas works, from Waterford to Clonmel. Bianconi's coaches connected, for many years, with a couple of the above-mentioned boats. The latter carried freight of a light character that was distributed in the interior by the coaches. During the period of the '48 troubles, even when Clonmel was under the "Insurrection Act," these boats had a free passage on the Suir, and a general permit to go unexamined, both at Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir. This short preface is necessary to explain the meaning of the following very innocent-looking letter. It was addressed to Mr. Kearney, and written by his step-brother—a gentleman who, in the fifties, became Governor of the Cashed jail. The latter retained the olden prefix of 'O', to the family name, which had been left aside a generation or so earlier by the former's branch. The letter, which is perfectly preserved reads thus:—

Waterford,
17th July, 1848.

"Dear Michael:
"John Dorney of the boat 'Black Swan' will convey to you a box of 'gas-fittings,' that I trust will be delivered in good condition. I hope they will suit the purposes for which they are intended, and that you may have occasion, at an early date, to test them. Please let me know, by bearer, how you found the contents of the box.

Yours fraternally,

"D. O'K."

John Dorney reached the quay of Clonmel on the 19th July, in the evening, and at once proceeded to Hearn's Hotel, in Ann street, to engage a cart to convey the box to the Gas House. It was a large box, about six feet long by three and a half wide, and correspondingly deep, marked on the cover, "Gas-fittings, this side up with care." The box reached the Gas House, on Northumberland street, at dusk, and as the cart passed into the yard, two gentlemen were standing in conversation, at the front door of the office. One of these was the manager, Mr. Kearney, the other was Sir Charles O'Donnell, the commander of the Forces, then stationed in Clonmel. As the cart drove in, John Dorney jumped down, came over and handed Mr. Kearney the foregoing letter, and then returned to assist the cart-driver to unload the box in the yard. Mr. Kearney open the letter, asking permission of Sir Charles to read it—as a matter of ordinary politeness—saying, "I wondered what that queer cargo could be." He then, as if without any special motive, handed the letter to Sir Charles—who had a weakness for all subjects affecting Irish genealogies—and asked him to look at the signature. After reading the short letter, Sir Charles asked him what there was strange in the initials. Mr. Kearney made reply: "They are my step-brother's initials, you see he calls himself O'Kearney, while we are simply Kearneys." This started Sir Charles on his favorite subject; and they crossed Prince Edward Place, and walked down the Mall together, chatting away about "O's" and "Mac's," and such like matters.

Finally, Mr. Kearney left the commander at the main guard, and returned home by way of the West Gate; having performed his role in the little drama, to his own satisfaction.

So far the stranger to the circumstances of those times will notice nothing peculiar about all these things. Remember the town was under "Insurrection Act;" no person was allowed abroad after nine in the evening without a permit from the commander; no person was allowed to either import or export any goods without having them fully examined; and suspicion was a sufficient cause for arrest; and arrest meant general penal servitude. They were on the eve of the rebellion, and the law was like the creature of Ezekiel's vision, wheel within wheel, and glistening with eyes. Yet there had been a very fair or-

ganization on the part of the Rebel Leaders. Had not circumstances been totally against them, their plans might have been realized. But it is not my business to discuss this phase of the subject. I am only recording a few facts that explain the old letter before. It had been arranged that when all would be in readiness for the general uprising and the seizure of the town, with its garrison, a signal light would be lit on the top of Sleivenamon. The moment that light would shoot up, a person at the Gas House would turn of the gas of the city, leaving it in perfect darkness. And as a matter of fact, during three entire nights a lady sat by the retorts, in position from which she could see the mountain-top, and awaited the signal that never came. Had that fire been lit her hand would have plunged Clonmel in darkness, and the "boys from the Wilcerness" would have made short work of Sir Charles and his forces. But the history of that period will tell why the light was never lit on Sleivenamon.

But this is rambling away from our subject. On his return home Mr. Kearney proceeded to the yard where Dorney had unloaded the box of "gas-fittings." It was carried in and placed in the office. When opened the boxes contained a splendid supply of "Pikes." And that night the same pikes were distributed to those who had need of them. They were of various designs, and as poor Meagher remarked, "their principal recommendation is that one of them is long enough to pin two fellows."

Seated here, to-night, in this year of Our Lord 1908, with this old letter on one side of me, and a despatch published from London telling of Redmond's speech in favor of the projected Land Purchase Bill, on the other side, I cannot but contrast the two dates, the two situations, and marvel at the mighty change that has come over the spirit and dream of Ireland during those fifty-five years.

There is to me something almost sacred about this innocent piece of paper. It tells a wonderful story; it conjures up scenes that can never be repeated; it is a surviving testator to the earnestness and the devotedness of men who were prepared to risk all for the cause that was dear to their hearts. It also might be made the corner stone of a literary edifice, in the form of true Irish historical romance. And, in all the excitement of that fevered time, there was a certain light-heartedness and good fellowship existing, that drove from the minds of the participants in the work all realization of the dangers that they incurred and the consequences that detection and failure might bring on them.

While going over these Old Letters I often imagine that were they in the possession of some one gifted with the talents required in historian or novelist, they might become the basis of a very distinct class of Irish literature. At all events they are connecting links that bind the present to the past, the living to the dead, the golden hopes of to-day to the shattered hopes of half a century ago; and, as such, I look upon them as relics well deserving of preservation. And lest they might some day—as some day they will—fade away and crumble in the hand of Time, I am anxious that the public should read them before they and all memory of those who wrote them, shall sink into the vastness of oblivion.

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