

THE NEW YEAR IN IRELAND.

No country in the world has better reason to look forward to at least a partial fruition of its hopes in the coming twelve months than has Ireland.

It is true that Mr. William O'Brien, notwithstanding the protests from both sides of the Atlantic, has insisted upon carrying out his determination to retire from public life. So long as he lives, however, his advice will continue to be sought and prized by his fellow-countrymen, and we understand that his influence will no longer be resisted by other Irish leaders. The concord of the Nationalist members of Parliament, which lately was threatened with disruption, seems to have been entirely restored. Since Mr. Parnell was deposed from the leadership of his party, the spokesmen of Ireland in Parliament have never, to all appearances, been more united. If they desire the enthusiastic and substantial support of friends in the United States, they will see to it that the harmony is not only ostensible, but sincere and permanent. We do not hesitate to say that the opportunity now offered them is decidedly more promising than that which they would have gained had Mr. Gladstone at the general election held in the summer of 1886 succeeded in carrying a majority of the constituencies. For, even could the first Home Rule Bill have been driven through the House of Commons, it would have encountered strenuous if not insurmountable resistance on the part of the overwhelming Unionist majority in the House of Lords.

The situation now confronting the Irish Nationalists at Westminster is essentially different. Their support is now imperatively needed, not only by the Liberals, but by the Unionist Government itself, dangerously weakened by the secession of the Free Fooders. Premier Balfour's political future depends on his ability to postpone a dissolution of Parliament until he is reasonably assured of the triumph of his new protectionist policy at the ballot box. To that end he must have the assistance of the Irish Nationalists, and there is scarcely any price that he might not be induced to pay for it. Already through his colleague, the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, he has promised that a bill for the relief of agricultural laborers shall be introduced and passed at the next session of Parliament. Neither is there any doubt that he will yield to the demand for an Irish Catholic University thoroughly equipped for teaching, as well as qualified to confer degrees. He has repeatedly declared himself in favor of such a measure, and his views are known to be shared by the Irish secretary. Hitherto he has shrunk from making a grant for the purpose named a Cabinet question, lest he should provoke the anger of the rabid anti-Catholics within the Unionist ranks. Mr. Balfour is now called upon to make his choice, and we have little doubt that he will risk their enmity, for at present his personal wishes coincide with his political interests.

Should Mr. Balfour deem it indispensable for the success of his fiscal programme that the life of the present Parliament should be prolonged beyond the present year, it is, not only possible, but probable, that he would seriously entertain a Nationalist proposal for some form of Home Rule. These are some of the reasons for thinking that the new year will offer Irishmen a chance of fulfilling their patriotic hopes such as was never within their grasp. We add that any concession which Mr. Balfour may be prevailed upon to make is almost certain to be sanctioned by the House of Lords, for in that body notwithstanding the defection of the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Goschen, the Premier still commands a large majority.—New York Sun.

Will you give me your hand and let me lead you away for a while from the smoke and bustle of the restless city, along lanes where thrushes are singing, between hedge rows where hawthorn is blooming and violets are hiding, till we come to an iron-barred gate set in a high stone wall? Beyond it, overarched by the glad spring sky with its fleet of drifting cloudships, a monastery nestles amid guardian trees. Grim and gray it must have been in the distant days when the old monks builded—every stone a protest against the strange and evil world from which it was their haven. But time's caressing hand has softened the rugged outlines... Sturdy roses scale the southern wall pressing their snowy heads against the painted chapel windows, and rains and suns of vanished summers have had their will of the massive stones, staining and mellowing and gliding with nature's kindly alchemy.

What stories could the old walls tell of the tiny village that once nestled in their shadow, its people turning to the monks for succor and comfort no less in bodily than in spiritual woe, till at last came a generation whose feet were set towards goals whither the kindly hands could no longer guide them, and faring forth driven by ambition and the lust of gain, they were swallowed up by the distant city, then in its small beginnings! What records of quiet heroism that would not have known itself by such high-sounding name, what tales of forgotten artists who wrought patiently year by year till their quiet chapel flowered in chastened loveliness! But hero and artist and saint, they left not even a name, when one by one they were borne out to the little graveyard on the hill, where pines sigh their requiem, and one towering cross tells the story common to all the quiet sleepers. "I have labored a little and found much cost." Some few incidents tradition has indeed rescued from the common fate, and from these I cull the tale of the artist-monk who high in the western turret worked and dreamed three centuries ago.

Among the convent treasures are still preserved the missals upon which he wrought with patient care, copying the text in even Gothic letter, then weaving with skillful brush the intricate Arabesque borders of crimson and green and gold. In the community room yet hangs a canvas upon which he pictured the blind beggar kneeling before the white-robed Christ, his prayer, "Lord, that I may see," written in his clasped hands, his bent form, in every line of his eager upturned face. Half lost among the shadows of the oak-paneled hall an "Ecce Homo," worthy of a place among the gems of a famous gallery, looks down with tender, pitying eyes upon the struggle of hearts that have not forgotten how to love and fear and suffer because they beat beneath garments of coarse dark serge. How lovingly these were painted in the scant intervals of the young monk's busy day, and how strenuously he fought the artist soul of him that irked against the monotonous round of daily duties which held him from his loved pursuit. Can we wonder if he found it sometimes hard to turn from his beautiful visions, and descend with feet that lagged a little to the pitiful group of pensioners on the convent bounties that daily in the courtyard awaited the coming of their strong young helper.

Is it strange that there were days when their petty jealousies wearied, their garrulity irritated, and he wished with the petulance of youth that it were sometimes right to have the pleasant things of life? And so day by day he fought and won his battles, granting himself over less leisure to work out the sketches for his great altar-piece of the "Ascension," of which he dreamed with all the artist's fluctuations of hope and despair.

Clearly on the bare canvas stretched across the easel, his soul's eye saw the glories his brush would soon reveal—that wondering group of Olivet's steep side, the attendant angels, the opening heavens, and one Form shadowy and indistinct but glorious beyond compare, with a Face upon which Nazareth and Gethsemane, and Calvary and Thabor, all had written their story.

The grateful daily petitions of our little ones, will we trust bring abundant blessings upon their kind benefactors and assure them a bright and prosperous New Year.

ANGELICO--A MEDITATION.

At weary last dawned a bright day, when, no smallest duty unfulfilled, Angelico stood before the canvas, brush in hand, ready to set his imprisoned fancies free.

So golden and fleeting the moments sped, his grateful task seemed but begun when the door softly opened and a lay-brother entered the room to tell of a man resting in the courtyard who craved speech of Angelico. The man seemed dispirited and ill, the brother continued, or he would have hesitated to disturb the artist at his work, but he knew Angelico would surely chide him should one of his poor be sent empty away. Barely glancing from his canvas, the artist answered, "Presently, brother, I doubt not 'tis Sebastian, who has come for the herbs I promised. Bid him wait," and once more his brush plied busily to and fro.

The setting sun was sending a shaft of ruddy light through the open window, when Angelico turned at length from his work full of a vague sense of discouragement. What was it, he asked, that the picture already lacked? His wonderful trick of color, his delicacy of imagination showed forth in every stroke, but somehow his work seemed soulless and labored and cold. How near success had been when that voice from the outer world called him from the heavenly glories opening out before him, but now the vision had winged its flight to inaccessible heights while far above him his ideal mocked at his attainment.

Turning sadly from the wet canvas he suddenly bethought him of the waiting beggar and reproaching himself for his lack of thought, hastened down the winding stair, to the deserted courtyard. Eagerly he searched, anxiously he questioned, but the unknown suppliant had vanished leaving no trace.

That evening, when after their frugal meal the community assembled for their hour of relaxation, Angelico, too heavy-hearted for their genial companionship, sought solitude in a shady recess formed by a jutting, deep-set window. No more disappointment at the failure of his work, a failure that the morrow's toll might well retrieve, had stirred his soul to such unwonted bitterness. 'Twas on the mysterious beggar his heavy thoughts were centered, in all his short life, the first of the Master's little ones who had sought his aid in vain.

"What will it profit thee," he asked of his troubled spirit, "that high above the great white altar thy picture speaks of Him whose teachings thou hast this day set at naught. Better for thee had the cup of cold water been proffered in His Name."

Thus musing, he gazed out with unheeding eyes upon the peaceful beauty of the night, the tall pines like grim sentinels guarding the graveyard on the hill, the velvet darkness of the sky thickly sown with golden points, the thin line of the crescent moon climbing swiftly out of the west and silencing peals after peals of the rugged building with faint, uncertain radiance.

At last, with heavy steps he turned to rejoin his brethren. A moon-beam falling slantwise through the casement clothed him in a mantle of light, and as he paused a moment, startled by an unwonted stir, he might have been some heavenly visitant, so tender and earnest the pale young face, so deep and dark the eyes, so golden bright the curls shining halo-like about the shaven crown.

Many turned wondering eyes upon him, and they who looked remembered, for in that moment Angelico was suddenly stricken old. The distant stir drew nearer, and swaying rustily upon its hinges the massive door swung wide to admit a lay-brother whose hurried step and anxious mien bore witness to some unwonted agitation. Hastening to the Superior's side he recounted, how, passing on his accustomed rounds with Brother Cyprian, making all fast and sure for the night, he had, close by the gate of the north garden, stumbled over the form of a man lying prostrate and seemingly lifeless upon the turf. They had borne him to the house where the porter had recognized

in him the man who that morning had craved speech of Brother Angelico.

Horror stricken the young monk listened to the brother's tale, then shaking off the chill fear that numbed his every nerve he cast himself at the Superior's feet, crying: "My Father, 'tis surely some dreadful error! In the uncertain light they have thought the man dead, when perchance he lay in a deep swoon from which our skill shall soon recall him. Oh, hasten! hasten! lest we come too late and I go forth marked with the brand of Cain."

With many a whispered prayer the monks hastened to the infirmary. Tenderly they gazed upon the quiet form lying on the humble pallet, but no hand was raised in gentle ministrations. Death had already laid his waxen mask over the wan, spent face, the weary feet had come at last to a peaceful bourne. By what strange paths must the wanderer have journeyed, travel-worn and world-weary, to the monastery's gate! Was his burden all of the suffering body, or came he, perchance, sin-laden to ease his troubled soul? Had some one told him of the un-failing charity of the artist-monk for sufferers such as he? Had he succumbed at last to hunger and fatigue, or perished beneath some deadly seizure against which their utmost skill would have vainly fought? Empty and idle all surmise. The mute lips were set in an inscrutable smile and the dead held fast his secret.

Beside him through the long night, Angelico kept vigil, and when the morning sun was high, kind hands made for him a resting place among the sleepers on the hillside, and the quiet current of the monastery's life, stirred for a brief space by his coming, flowed on peacefully as of yore.

But for Angelico the glory of life had faded. Self-exiled from the dream-world where of old he dwelt with his bright fancies, he sought in rigid fulfilling of duties once so irksome, a brief forgetfulness of the sorrow that gnawed his heart. Fasts and penance, and weary vigil he offered in alms for the wanderer's soul, but always heavier grew the burden that weighed upon his heart.

At last one night when, tired of body and heavy of spirit, he lay upon his pallet wrapped in fitful and broken slumber, there came to him a strange, sad dream. He saw himself, old and foot-sore and very weary, dragging himself with painful steps along a stony road upon which the noonday sun beat with pitiless glare. Afan on gleamed the velvet sward of a beautiful garden where giant trees made a grateful shade, and the babble of a sun-kissed brook mingled with the notes of the sweet-voiced birds in wondrous harmony. And Angelico strained desperately onward, thinking that when this fair goal was won he would cast his aching form on the cool green sward and slake his thirst at the sedgy margin of the rippling brook. But when at last, infinitely weary, he won the gates of this fair domain he saw guarding them an angel whose face though radiant and glorious was strangely like that of the dead beggar. In that countenance, tender and pitiful, he read an irrevocable decree against which he desperately struggled, pleading for shelter and rest at last. Wafted from far distance in a voice whose searching reproach stabbed his heart with chill despair, he heard the words to which he oft had hearkened with scarce a thought of their awful import, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto me." And with their echo in his soul Angelico awakened to thank God that the day of atonement had not already sped.

Often during the time of trial, when the dire consequence of his momentary lapse from duty weighed upon his spirit with crushing force, he had sought the Superior's room in quest of solace that had never been withheld. Thither he again repaired, his heart steeled to a stern resolve. Never more would the spell of canvas and color lure him from joy in creation, his pardonable pride in achievement which, however splendid, he knew to be but faint fore-shadowings of the work of his maturer genius, the precious plaudits of the little world for which he wrought—all these he would give in exchange for his soul.

We of to-day with souls steeped in the doctrine of Art's Supreme Right, witnessing as a daily spectacle that scarce excites our comment the sacrifice of innocence and faith upon her shrine, can scarcely understand the far other aims and values prevailing in Angelico's world. Were there in our sane age some genius mad enough to sacrifice art-sacred art to an unrecognized standard of right, how many lands would be stretched out to bar his way, how many voices raised in indignant protest. But in that cloistered world no voice deterred the artist from making atonement in what, with reason good or ill, he deemed the only way. Still, that he might not hastily renounce a work about which his very heart strings twined, the Superior exacted the painting of yet another picture to set within the empty niche that loomed above the great white altar. In the accustomed work Angelico might once again find joy and peace and if, his task completed, he still should seek the thorny path of renunciation, he would not journey forth in ignorance of the cost. The cost we dimly guess as we gaze to-day with misty eyes upon the wondrous altar-piece, knowing that Angelico came to the fullness of his power in the moment when he laid aside the art which had been life's crown and glory. And yet of all his works it is the least ambitious. Not the splendid "Ascension" of his youthful dreams is shrined to-day above the Gothic altar, but the piteous human ascension in virtue of which Angelico claimed kinship with the desolate group on Olivet's steep side across whose musings broke the angel's clarion call to a new life, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking up to Heaven?" Fear of the hostile world that waits their coming, dread of the strange new ways their feet must tread, infinite yearning, haunting sadness, and over all the faint dawning of a great peace. Something of all this we read in the pictured faces, but the spell of the canvas is subtle and elusive. Looking upon it we feel as though a veil had parted and across the centuries we gaze deep into Angelico's soul. Of the after years there is scant record. Tradition has it that Angelico's days were spent among the solitudes of the North garden which blossomed in wondrous beauty beneath his care, the passing of the peaceful seasons marked only by the blooming and fading of lovely old-world flowers. Came at last a year whose dreadful memory tradition yet keeps fresh, when grim Pestilence stalking through the land invaded the peaceful village that nestled in the shadow of the monastery walls. Like frightened children its people fled for aid to their strong, brave helpers, and splendidly the monks gave battle, wrestling for each precious life or speeding with faith's sweet comforts the passing soul. And almost unnoted in the forefront of the unequal strife there fought and fell Angelico.

HAVE PATIENCE STILL.

O Father, when my heart grows lone,
And I would be where all is rest,
I give Thee thanks, my thought is known
Thine, whose will is always best,
For I am weak, and human pain
Has ever pressed upon my way,
And, wearied oft, with stress and strain,
My burden at Thy feet I'd lay!
Yet, I, again, am glad to bear
Whatever cross Thy love may send,
For well I know didst Thou not care,
No grief would e'er on me attend.
So, Father, should my heart complain,
Because sore-crushed beneath its load,
Have patience still; Thine ire restrain,
And help me on the weary road!
—Amadeus, O.S.F., in St. Anthony's Messenger.

THE POPE AND THE BLIND.

The following touching scene in Rome, is recorded by one of our exchanges.—

One of the most famous of the many charitable institutions of Rome is the blind asylum attached to the historic Church of St. Alexius, on the Aventine. For many years past a part of the fees received at the Vatican have been devoted to the maintenance of this institute, so that it may be said in a special sense a Pontifical institution. Last week the superiors addressed a petition to the Holy Father asking him to grant the consolation of his poor blind children of being admitted to his presence.

The request was granted the day it was made, and within twenty-four hours afterward a singularly touching scene took place in the Loggia of Raphael. One noticed the absence of the usual cheering and commotion which attend the appearance of the Holy Father. The four or five score of blind men of all ages had to be told by the guides that the Holy Father was already among them. Then one of them stood out a little from the rest and delivered a brief address, in which he said that though they were deprived of the happiness of seeing the face of the Holy they knew it was one to be loved and revered.

His Holiness was deeply touched and the tears stood in his eyes when the group began to sing with exquisite feeling the Pope's hymn and the "Ave Maria." After giving each of them his ring to kiss, and bestowing medals on all present, he spoke to them encouragingly and expressed his great satisfaction at the wonderful progress they had made in the different trades and occupations they had learnt in their home. Then he retired to his apartment, while his blind visitors were led carefully down one of the great staircases of the Vatican.

THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND.

The Catholic Church is making rapid strides in Scotland. Scarce a week passes that the erection of a church, school or presbytery cannot be chronicled. Irishmen and Irishwomen are truly fulfilling their mission—that of spreading the light—in the "Land of mountain and brown heather"—the land of their adoption. Looking at the subscription lists in the different parishes, the names of Irishmen figure prominently.

Within the past few weeks in St. Patrick's parish towards the erection of a high altar, a prominent Irishman in the person of Mr. James Grant, J.P., subscribed \$500; Mr. Peter Maguire, \$500; Mr. T. Colgan, \$250, etc. In St. Andrew's Cathedral parish, Mr. Dominick McCreedie subscribed \$500; Mr. Edw. McLaughlin, \$500; Mr. Hugh Boyle, \$500, etc.; while another Irishman who has withheld his name, has given \$2,500 to the seminary, Bearsden.

Another fact worthy of record is, that bigotry is largely on the wane in Scotland. Whether this is due to the largely increasing Irish population and the prominent position as citizens in which they have placed themselves, or to the broadmindedness of Scotchmen in this twentieth century, we cannot tell, but the fact remains that Catholic Irishmen are daily being more respected and considered and placed on equal footing with their Scotch fellow-townsmen. This is only as it should be, and Irishmen have themselves to thank for this change in the times in Scotland.

A further evidence of this change of spirit in Scotchmen was to be found in the reception accorded to Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P., on his recent visit to Glasgow. Coming as he did, on the invitation of Scotchmen, to lecture to the Scotch Society of Literature and Art in Glasgow Athenaeum on "Parliament and its Personalities," his reception was most cordial, and the impression he made a lasting one. Speaking of Mr. O'Connor's lecture to a leading Glasgow merchant, who was present on the occasion referred to, he said: "I was simply entranced with your countryman's eloquence, and so were the vast crowd who listened to him. It was the greatest treat I ever listened to."

Whatever you may have in your purse, carry hope in your heart and spend it freely.

No true man believes that it is not possible to do great things without great riches.

Card of Thanks.

The Sisters of Charity of St. Patrick's Orphan Asylum desire to warmly thank their many friends who so generously remembered the orphans on Christmas day. To one, and all, we return our most appreciative thanks, and such a return as lies in our power we gladly and unflinchingly make in all our devotions. The grateful daily petitions of our little ones, will we trust bring abundant blessings upon their kind benefactors and assure them a bright and prosperous New Year.