

LETTER TO MICHAEL CUSACK, DECEMBER 18th, 1884.

From *The Irishman*, December 27, 1884.

MY DEAR SIR – I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your commission inviting me to become a patron of the “Gaelic Athletic Association,” of which you are, it appears, the Hon. Secretary. I accede to your request with the utmost pleasure.

One of the most painful, let me assure you, and, at the same time, one of the most frequently recurring reflections that, as an Irishman, I am compelled to make in connection with the present aspect of things in this country, is derived from the ugly and irritating fact, that we are daily importing from England not only her manufactured goods, which we cannot help doing, since she has practically strangled our own manufacturing appliances, but, together with her fashions, her accent, her vicious literature, her music, her dances, and her manifold mannerisms, her games also and her pastimes, to the utter discredit of our own grand National sports, and to the sore humiliation, as I believe, of every genuine son and daughter of the old land.

Ball-playing, hurling, football kicking according to Irish rules, ‘casting,’ leaping in various ways, wrestling, handy-grips, top-pegging, leap-frog, rounders, tip-in-the-hat, and all such favourite exercises and amusements, amongst men and boys, may now be said to be not only dead and buried, but in several localities to be entirely forgotten and unknown. And what have we got in their stead? We have got such foreign and fantastic field sports as lawn-tennis, polo, croquet, cricket, and the like – very excellent, I believe, and health-living exercises in their way, still not racy of the soil, but rather alien, on the contrary, to it, as are, indeed, for the most part the men and women who first imported and still continue to patronise them.

And, unfortunately, it is not our National *sports* alone that are held in dishonour, and dying out, but even our most suggestive National celebrations are being gradually effaced and extinguished, one after another, as well. Who hears now of snap-apple night, or

bonfire night? They are all things of the past, too vulgar to be spoken of, except in ridicule, by the degenerate candies of the day. No doubt there is something rather pleasing to the eye in the 'get up' of a modern young man who, arrayed in light attire, with party coloured cap on, and racket in hand, is making his way, with or without a companion, to the tennis ground. But, for my part, I should vastly prefer to behold, or think of, the youthful athletes whom I used to see in my early days at fair and pattern, bereft of shoes and coat, and thus prepared to play at hand-ball, to fly over any number of horses, to throw the 'sledge' or 'winding-stone,' and to test each other's mettle and activity by the trying ordeal of 'three leaps,' or a 'hop, step, and jump.'

Indeed, if we continue travelling for the next score years in the same direction that we have been going in for some time past, contemning the sports that were practised by our forefathers, effacing our national features as though we were ashamed of them, and putting on, with England's stuffs and broad-cloths, her '*masher*' habits and such other effeminate follies as she may recommend, we had better at once, and publicly, abjure our Nationality, clap hands for joy at sight of the Union Jack, and place 'England's bloody red' exultingly 'above the green.'

Deprecating, as I do, any such dire and disgraceful consummation, and seeing in your society of athletes something altogether opposed to it, I shall be happy to do for it all that I can, and authorise you now formally to place my name on the roll of your patrons.

In conclusion, I earnestly hope that our National journals will not disdain, in future, to give suitable notices of those Irish sports and pastimes which your society means to patronise and promote, and that the masters and pupils of our Irish colleges will not henceforth exclude from their athletic programmes such manly exercises as I have just referred to and commemorated.

I remain, my dear sir, your very faithful servant,
T. W. CROKE,
Archbishop of Cashel.