

NATIONAL SPORTS.

By Charles Joseph Kickham.

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There are acts of parliament to prevent Irishmen from possessing arms, or learning how to use them, or practising any sort of military exercise. But we have yet to learn that there is a law against manly sports with which arms or their use have no connection. The authorities, however, seem to think that they can put a stop to the time-honoured recreations of the people independently of acts of parliament. In some districts, the magistrates and police—not, we presume, without orders from head-quarters—have set their faces against hurling and foot-ball, and even against dancing. Striking a ‘goal puck’ endangers the peace of society; ‘high gates’ is high treason; rebellion lurks in ‘hell and heaven;’ and ‘cover the buckle’ is a cloak for conspiracy. A score or two of young men and women cannot meet on a Sunday afternoon, but some Justice SHALLOW, with a party of peelers at his heels, will charge in amongst them and put a stop to their amusements. If the young men, knowing they are safe as far as the law is concerned, refuse to ‘disperse,’ then a system of brow-beating is resorted to by the ‘authorities.’ Threats are muttered and names taken down. Of course there can be no ‘summonses’ where there is no breach of the law. But it is no uncommon thing for a tenant-farmer to get a hint next day from the bailiff that it would be wise for him to keep his sons at home. A pious policeman will occasionally appeal to the refractory youths, by telling them ‘to be said by their clergy.’ Our young friends cannot fail to be edified by a peeler’s concern for their spiritual welfare.

Now, why all this anxiety to put down our old sports and pastimes? The talk about breaking the Sabbath is all ‘bosh.’ It is the only day the people have for recreation. And, as far as vice and immorality are concerned, young men and women are far more likely

to err while 'mooching' in holes and corners, or card-playing in shebeen houses, than out in the free air of heaven with the goal ball flying and hurleys clashing, and bright eyes shining applause for the victor. There is more vice of every sort attending a single horse-race, than could be traced to the hurling matches of half a century. But horse-racing is an aristocratic amusement, and therefore we have no attempts to put it down. We hear it said that young men would murder one another if hurling were permitted. This is a calumny invented by our enemies. It is simply telling us that we are savages. More blows have been struck at fairs and markets, and even on Sundays and holidays after Mass, than ever were struck at hurlings. Bad-tempered and silly men can break their neighbours' heads at a funeral as easily as in a hurling field. Our fathers and grandfathers hurled and leaped and danced, and we cannot see why we should not do the same.

But are the people such fools as to think that those who have levelled their homes to the ground, and are doing their best to drive them from the land of their birth, would care a straw if Irishmen were smashing each others' heads every day in the week? The people know it cannot be love for them that makes their tyrants so anxious to discourage athletic exercises among them. Our masters see that manly sports have a tendency to foster manliness. And manliness they will not have in Ireland, if they can help it. They would make the Irishman feel every hour of his life that he is a slave. Hence the shadow of the peeler crosses his path at every turn. Another good may come of this. It may help to disgust young men with their country, and make them fly the more quickly from it. The police, we know, are very necessary and useful in detecting and preventing real crimes. They must be so, it is part of the system. If they were not, all men could see through the deception. And besides those real crimes, generally, if not checked, might disturb unpleasantly the repose of the favoured few. It is by this mixing up of right and wrong, England gains her ends everywhere.

As a rule our young men are sober, moral and intelligent. So far from being worse in these respects than their fathers and

grandfathers, we believe they are better. Therefore we see no good reason for debarring them from the recreations which their fathers and grandfathers practised. We trust they will keep up the good old customs, and do so in a manner that will give the lie to their enemies, who would brand them as blood-thirsty savages.

We must say, however, that we see no good in turning these sports into political demonstrations. We see no need of public demonstrations at all. Our work must be done in quite a different way. There is no use in exposing ourselves to the enemy *when nothing is to be gained by doing so*. In the meantime let the dance and the hurling 'go ahead.' And please Heaven there shall be many a merry dance, and many a goal hurled on the green sward of old Ireland, when tyrant and traitor shall have been driven for ever from her shores.