

SLEIGH-RIDING IN IRELAND.



MY first coming to Canada, there was one thing particularly which struck my fancy as a boy, and at the same time appeared to me as an example of Canadian compared with Irish liberty, and that was sleigh-riding. As the students are now enjoying themselves with skating, sliding and such like amusements, I thought that a few words in regard to the manner in which their *confrères* in Ireland succeed with these sports, would be welcomed by the readers of the OWL.

I will therefore try to amuse my readers by a description of sliding in my own native city of Armagh. In Armagh there are many hills, among which the most prominent for sleighing purposes are Primrose Hill and Callan St: these two being so steep as to make an angle of about fifty degrees, with the street crossing at the bottom. Now, the novelist would say, "the story begins." We will suppose it to be the month of November, towards the end of which the weather gets very cold, and the youths of the city begin to expect "slides" soon. The cold increases and the pupils of the different schools hold a meeting and decide, after a careful study of the heavens that "it's freezin'" and "it's time to water the slide." This last measure being decided upon, they resolve to come out that night about half past nine, each one bringing a bucket of water, the meeting dissolves and the youthful astronomers disperse "for fear the horneys (the name given to the police during the sliding season) might notice them." The boys retire to their homes, and the streets are unusually quiet that evening, so that the "bobbies" think that they need not inconvenience themselves by marching up and down the cold streets, and accordingly they drop into a gateway, muffle themselves up in their deep collars, and await the relief guard. But if the police are at rest the boys are not, for the moment that the policeman (on this particular street) drops off his beat, the watchers come along uttering a mysterious cry, yet one fraught with a pleasant hearing to the many youths awaiting it. Then silently the night

workers assemble and climb the steep hill, each with the prescribed bucket of water, and arriving at the top they proceed, with the greatest solemnity to empty the buckets one after another till all are emptied, when they all go home, to dream of sliding all next day, or to get more water, if there is not already enough on the slide. All is done so quietly and quickly, that by this time the man on guard is probably asleep.

Morning dawns at last, and a great many parents are surprised to see their sons up very early and running about with smiling faces, more cheerful and obliging than was their wont. But the boys have a reason for their merriment, and "it freezed last night" is whispered from one to another in joyful tones. Then the cars, as they call their clumsy makeshift of a sled, are brought out, and lots cast to determine upon who shall watch the "horneys." When this point is decided, the sliders take their places at the top of the hill, each with a car in his hand and at a given signal the sliders take a short run, fall down on their cars, and with a loud whoop the first slide takes place and the slide is formally opened. This goes on for some time, sliding down and climbing the hill only to go down again, till the sport becomes so exciting as to make the watchers think that they have watched long enough, which necessarily occasions some disturbance, as no one is willing to give up his slide. When this point has been satisfactorily arranged after no small amount of arguing, the sliding recommences. There they go: laughing, shouting, yelling, and tantalizing the on lookers who are not fortunate enough to have cars. Their only care seems to be to make the car run faster, when Rush! every car is steered into the channel as the terrific cry "The Horneys; the Horneys! pull up! pull up!" bursts on their ears. Then what a race! Here come the sliders up the steep hill carrying their cars on their backs, and, at their heels—a policeman, a policeman. How strangely it sounds. Old men and women who wish "them young rascals would be put in jail, breaking people's old bones with their slides," even they would save the sliders from—a policeman. As Sir