

brimful of anticipated enjoyment, collect to the trysting place.

The young men, in groups, collect from different parts of the country. They came on leaping over hedges and ditches, laughing, shouting, and singing in reckless joviality.

All preliminaries being arranged by the elders, twenty-one young men at a side were selected. The spectators then retired to the ditches, and the ball was thrown up among the rival parties.

The ball was struck here and there, often pucked up in the air, then hit again before it reached the ground. Such lucky hits were acknowledged by cheers from the spectators. Then by tumbling, tossing, feint blows, and the like, at length one party succeeded in driving it to the goal, amidst a peal of shouts and hurras from the friends of the victors.

It was a glorious sight to see these fine athletic young fellows, stripped off in their linen, their damp hair floating around their faces, and a handkerchief, which they got from some colleen who wished them luck, bound around their waists—to see them thus, with flushed brows and kindling eyes, striving for victory.

All this time the old men and women were looking on, and encouraging the combatants, and prognosticating their future greatness from their feats. To hear their expression of natural pride out of their own sons, and their ecomiums on their neighbors. To hear one old man, with a sigh, regretting to his neighbour their young days.

“When the priest and the gentlemen used to head us, and we were all dressed out like jockeys in jackets and caps, and the green was all roped; thim were the times, Bill, when we used to have the fun.”

“True for you, Jack; God be with thim times.”

And both sighed at the degeneracy of the days they had lived to see.

An Irish hurling was a glorious sight, no doubt; so think we, and so thought Louis XVI., when the young students from Munster and Leinster, dressed in green and white silk jackets and caps, amused his majesty and court by a game of Irish hurling match.

All Paris went to see them, and the strong athletic young fellows, fired with national pride; strove in glorious rivalry, until the King and court, and all Paris too, cried out that no exercise ever surpassed it.

When the hurlers have wiped their damp

brows and hair, they retire to make a match of leaping, or of casting a stone; or more likely to join the girls, who are dressed out in all their finery, with their hair nicely combed behind their ears, and braided with the utmost elegance, and who are enjoying themselves at “drop the glove,” “hide and go seek,” or some other amusement equally innocent. There was an elegance in their fine natural movements, their light floating dresses, their blushing cheeks and smiling faces, which gave a fascinating beauty and picturesqueness to them.

Most likely the old traveling piper has set up his stand in some corner, and is puffing away at the “Humors of Glin,” “Rory O’Moore,” “The Fox hunter’s Jig,” or the like. Then to see the boys and girls twisting, capering, jumping, timing the music with their heads, their hands, and feet; turning and shuffling as if they were bit by a tarantula. Oh! it was grand! it showed the elasticity and exuberance of spirit of the Irish peasant. But now, what has become of all this fine genuine feeling? Oh, the famine years and a grasping landocracy have crushed and broken all the finer feeling of their nature; have made them what they wished them to be—helpless slaves in their own green land.

Alice had the tea-things laid before Father O’Donnell. The nice fresh cream, the yellow butter, the hot smoking cakes, and the clean cups and saucers looking so pleasant and tempting that he rubbed his hands with delight, and wondered to himself how Mrs. Hogan couldn’t make things look so comfortable at all. What made the fire burn so bright and cheerily? What made Father O’Donnell feel so very happy as he reclined in his arm-chair, and looked about him the perfect picture of content? What made Carlo frisk and leap with joy as he did? and what made puss purr his cronann longer than usual on the warm hearth-rug? As I am a bachelor I cannot well answer the question myself; but this I say, if I were in Frank O’Donnell’s place, I would think that Alice had lent some witchery to the whole.

“This is comfortable, my children,” said Father O’Donnell, as he rubbed his hands again, and looked at the tea-table and then at Frank and Alice; “it is comfortable to have a home to cover one’s head from the storms and sneers of the world—to have peace and plenty with all, and a few fond hearts to enjoy it with one; even for an old priest this is pleasant. O God, grant me these, and shower down riches upon the avaricious, and fame and glory