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No. 179—JAMES BIRRANE of Dromin

SIXTY-THREE years ago, the South Limerick Hurling Club, with their headquarters at Bruree, won their one and only Limerick county senior hurling crown.

LOYALTY OF CLUB.

The distinction was achieved at a period when the games in Limerick were at a low ebb, due to the cleavage in national ranks resulting from the Parnellite "split." The South Limerick lads were one of the few clubs that held fast to the ideals of the then infant G.A.A., at that period of its first major trial, and all credit must go to them for their loyalty and steadfastness at a vital time.

Even the County Board went out of existence during this trying period, and the actual championship which the Bruree lads won was played off under the auspices of the Central Council, with Frank B. Dinneen of Ballylanders, its Vice-President, directly in charge.

The final was played at Croom on October 19th, 1893, and the South Limerick lads won, scoring 8-1 to a solitary point, notched by their opponents, St. Michael's. Mr. Spencer Lyon, refereed.

The Croom Band attended and rendered a selection of national airs during the interval, order being maintained by a body of stewards, under the control of Very Rev. E. Sheehy, P.P., Bruree, and Rev. Father Carroll, C.C., Croom.

PLAYED PROMINENT PART.

One of the South Limerick players who took a prominent part in that well merited success was James Birrane, of Dromin, who came very much into the season as a hurler, footballer and athlete of much promise.

He might easily have won dual honours in 1893 but for the fact that the football championship was abandoned for lack of entries. The Dromin Club, of which Birrane was a member, was a very flourishing one at the time. Captained by that dynamic personality, Larry Roche, it was going great guns, and but for the unfortunate political upheaval it is fairly certain that it would have left its impress on the football records of the period.

In athletics, Jim Birrane proved his worth in the best of company, and had he travelled to the many meetings of his day it is fairly certain he would have left a record of successes that would fill a sizeable document. Family difficulties that ruled out travel beyond a convenient radius, and a natural shyness which caused him to shun the popular meetings and the publicity associated with them, meant that he confined his activities to a few local "meets" where, however, he gave ample evidence of his athletic endowment.

NOTED PERFORMERS.

One of his first recorded successes was at Kilmallock Sports, held on November 1st, 1893, where the competitors included such noted performers as the world record beater, John Flanagan, and his brother, Tom J. M. Hynan, of Garryspillage; W. K. Martin (Galbally), W. Drake (Kilfinane), D. Higgins (Kilmallock) and Larry Roche (Dromin).

On that occasion, he won the 240 yards flat event from scratch; was second to Hynan in the 440 yards and tied with Drake for second place in the running high jump, which M. Sheehy of Kilmallock won.

Two years later, on August 15th, 1895, we find him at Kilfinane Sports, where the company was of the highest class—Paddy Leahy, John Flanagan, Dan Shanahan, William Ennery, Larry Roche, Denis Carey, J. J. Condon, D. Hyland (Glenroe) and J. Foran of Broadford. He took two prizes from that meeting—the 220 and the 880—and repeated the success a fortnight later, at Kilmallock, where the meeting was highlighted by the presence of Paddy ("Dockety") McNamara, fresh from his All-Ireland athletic championship triumph at Wexford, where he won four national titles—100 yards and 220 yards flat, running long jump and running hop step and jump.

He was prominent in the same

exalted company twelve months later at Kilfinane, where he took a prize in the 440 yards flat. That proved a memorable gathering, with Flanagan, Carey and McNamara fresh from triumphs at the English championship sports at Northampton and the Ireland v. Scotland international contest at Ballsbridge.

HERO OF EPIC ACHIEVEMENTS

A close friend of the Flanagans, Jim Birrane was intensely proud of John's wonderful achievements in the athletic arena. He often spoke of the great weight-thrower and I heard him remark on more than one occasion that "Flanagan was the hero of epic achievements in his

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era, and will always retain top place in my memory dearest."

He delighted to tell how John won the most valuable medal ever contested for in athletics—the Dowling Trophy, worth fifteen hundred dollars, half a century ago. It was presented by Judge Dowling, of New York, and is emblematic of the championship of the world in weight throwing. It was made of solid gold, exquisitely modelled, and Jim always maintained it was a trophy that should have been purchased for the nation and presented to the National Museum.

Also a keen admirer of Tom Flanagan, who, in addition to athletics, took a deep interest in boxing, Jim liked to tell a story he had heard from Tom, concerning the American boxing scene.

The coloured population of Atlantic City wanted to see Sam Langford fight, and the best opponent the promoters could dig up for Sam was a negro waiter. Sam didn't need boosting, so the promoters started boosting the waiter.

As the day of the fight approached the coloured population, having read so much of the waiter, got to thinking he probably would whip Sam.

One of the promoters came to Sam and called him aside. "Sam," he said, "this waiter has got to be a great favourite. Let him stick the eight rounds and then come back and you'll draw a big pile of money."

THOUGHT WELL OF THE IDEA.

Sam thought very well of the idea and agreed to let the waiter "stick."

When Sam got in the ring he received a big ovation. Then the waiter got in and received one twice as big. Sam didn't like that

very much, but, remembering his agreement, he proceeded to let the waiter make a showing.

Every time the waiter hit Sam on top of the head the crowd yelled its head off and called on the waiter to kill Sam. Sam didn't like that either. Just before the end of the fifth round, the waiter, in coming out of a clinch, accidentally struck Sam on the mouth with his elbow and split his lip.

The bell rang and Sam went to his corner. When he came out again he reached out and shook the waiter's hand. "Why, Mister Langford," said the waiter, much surprised, "this ain't the last round, this is only the sixth!" "Coloured man," said Sam, "so fah as yo's concerned, dis am de last round."

An ardent Gael always, Jim Birrane had long since retired from the active arena when the cause of nationhood again called him to action. His ardent and patriotic spirit found him in the thick of the Volunteer movement, and when the fight got hottest, the savagery and brutality of the oppressor only strengthened the will and resolve of a true Irishman, who lived to enjoy, for over quarter of a century, the freedom he helped in no ungenerous measure to win.