

No. 162—MICHAEL F. CROWE

of Ballysimon

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

OFTEN referred to as the "Prince of referees," Michael F. Crowe of Ballysimon, was undoubtedly one of the greatest men ever to handle a big hurling or football game. Yet he was not a player of the games at all, his only claim to association with the active arena being when he lined out on a few occasions with the old Dublin Fianna Club, when they happened to be short of players for an engagement. Micky was one of the first Secretaries of that then popular club and just turned out to prevent the team giving a walk-over, for he always maintained that his contribution to the game was next to worthless.

If his value as a player was down to his own estimate of his prowess hardly matters, for "M.F." quickly gained fame in another sphere, and in a short time everyone acknowledged his ability as a referee, and his name and fame as such was as wide as Ireland itself.

**LINKS WITH CULTURAL AND ATHLETIC NATIONALISM.**

Micky, at an early age, entered the service of the Great Southern and Western Railways, and just before the turn of the century he was transferred to the Metropolis, where he immediately became associated with many national movements—the Celtic Literary Society and the Fianna Hurling Club being his first links with cultural and athletic nationalism.

While associated with the latter body he became the second Secretary of the League of the Dublin Hurling Clubs, an office that quickly introduced him to the task of refereeing, at which he later became so adept. His first effort with the whistle was a forced affair, when the appointed official failed to put in an appearance, but he made such a success of the job that he was in regular and popular demand ever after.

Under Micky's charge the Hurling League made splendid progress. His administrative abilities, energies and tact soon brought him the further confidence of the Gaels, and in succession he served the G.A.A. on the Dublin County Board, Leinster Council, and finally on the Central Council, of which he was one of the Trustees up to the time of his all too early death.

**IN MUCH REQUEST**

His acumen and firmness as a referee soon brought him into much request for important inter-county contests, as his handling of two of the greatest games of early G.A.A. days, the famous Kerry-Kildare matches in the 1903 All-Ireland senior football final, proved that he possessed exceptional capacity for such duties.

Only recently, one of the heroes of those great tussles, Joe Rafferty, of Naas, then the Kildare captain, when being questioned concerning the early prowess of the "Lilywhites" remarked: "I'm always being asked about the great men I played with and against, but no one ever asks me about the referees I played under."

Joe continued: "Well, I'm going to tell you this, that the G.A.A. had plenty of good hurlers and footballers, too, in my time, but they had only one great referee in the years I saw, and that was the late Micky Crowe, God rest him. I played under him often, and he was as hard on me as he was on anyone else, but he was the best referee that ever I saw."

**HIS GREATNESS AS REFEREE.**

...a authority on Gaelic games, and one of the best writers in the annals of hurling, once penned these lines concerning Micky: "I remember congratulating him on one occasion at the old Jones's Road venue, where he had conducted a fiercely contested Dublin county final, which many thought would never be played on to the last second of the game.

There was a lot of excitement, and the atmosphere inside the arena seemed at times uncomfortably near the flash point of danger. The coolest man on the field amid all the excitement was "M.F." in his white jersey, and everywhere the play was he kept the game completely in hand up to the end. When I asked him the secret of his success, in so many similar situations, his reply was: 'Well, I know human nature pretty well.' So he did, God rest his soul."

And recently, a great Munster hurler of the old days gave his opinion of Micky as a knight of the whistle when he said: "A well-known writer of the time summed up Micky Crowe once and for all nearly a century ago when he described him as 'fast, fit, fearless and fair.' And I cannot see what anyone could possibly add to that description."

**THE 1910 HURLING FINAL.**

Maybe the greatest tribute paid Micky during his years with the whistle was when he was appointed to take charge of the All-Ireland hurling final of 1910, in which his native Limerick opposed Wexford. This was the first occasion on which sideline seats were provided at a Gaelic venue, and also marked the introduction of the "parallelogram" rule. The latter rule, in its early application, gave rise to no little confusion, and it was perhaps unfortunate for Limerick that it was introduced for the first time in this final. The umpires were Jim Harrington, of Cork, Chairman of the Munster Council; Jack Grace, of Kilkenny, well-known hurler and footballer, with the Dublin Kickhams; Joe Ward, of Louth, a great Gaelic administrator, and an American visitor. The latter was not conversant with the new rule and his decisions on more than one occasion did not meet with the approval of Limerick. This game aroused a lot of controversy, but the referee's handling of a difficult final was never questioned.

M. F. Crowe's organising work on behalf of native games, and his official capacity brought him into contact with Gaels from all counties, and from Great Britain, with all of whom he was held in the highest esteem, and his advice and judgement accepted with universal respect.

**INVALUABLE SUPPORT.**

As early as 1903 he was one of the Secretaries of the Gaelic section, which formed the most impressive feature of the Emmet Centenary commemoration in Dublin, and in all the big promotions of the Wolfe Tone Committee—both Gaelic and musical—he lent invaluable support. His services were likewise frequently placed at the disposal of the Gaelic League, in the progress of which he took a keen and kindly interest.

His progress in the service of the G.S.&W.R. was rapid. His abilities and efficiency were quickly recognised, and some years before his untimely death he became District Auditor on the Southern sections, being stationed at Cork up to the time of his last illness.

Still a young man, "M.F." seemed destined to render further great service to the cause which he had so earnestly espoused and for which he had accomplished work of inestimable worth. It was not to be, however, and Gaelic Ireland lost one whose too short life epitomised in his fruitful career much of the growth, progress and prestige which the National Athletic movement had gained during the last score of years of his life.