

Great Limerick Athletes

No. 87—CHARLIE HOLLAND of Limerick City

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

THIS week we pay tribute to a figure that never made his mark on the athletic track or the playing fields, yet one who devoted his life to providing the opportunities for others to keep the name and fame of Limerick before the sports-loving people of Ireland, and the many other lands where the scattered Gael have found a home.

Charlie Holland was one of the biggest names behind the athletic and Gaelic movement in Limerick for close on forty years, and it is due to his courage, foresight and organising abilities that interest was revived on a few occasions when the movement seemed in imminent danger of collapsing.

He played a leading part in putting the G.A.A. on a firm foundation in the county and was also prominently associated with the purchase and early development of the grounds at Ennis Road, which have since become the worthy headquarters of Limerick Gaeldom, playing host each year to huge hostings of Gaels from every corner of Munster and far outside its confines—a departure that could hardly be visualised during the years of struggle to make it even a pitch suitable for the more important games of the local championships.

Gaelic League Club.

Charlie first came into prominence in Limerick Gaelic affairs around the turn of the century, but the first record we find of his officership is contained in a report of the annual meeting of the Gaelic League Club held in the Town Hall on February 17th, 1901, when the appointments were: President, Jim Galvin; Treasurer, J. McKerren; Secretaries, C. Holland and W. Crowe. Committee: J. Dalton, J. O'Connor, M. Storan, D. Meaney, D. Egan and M. Gleeson.

Twelve months later, on February 28th, 1902, the Limerick Junior Board was formed at a meeting held in the Commercial Hotel. The officers elected were: President, C. Holland (Gaelic League F.C.); Vice-President, E. Reidy (Cannock's H.C.); Treasurer, J. F. Guinnane (Desmond's F.C.); Secretary, J. Healy.

First Junior Hurling Championship.

The first Junior Hurling Championship was organised under his direction and the final, played at the Markets Field on August 10th, 1902, resulted: Treaty, 8-9; St. Patrick's, 2-4. A football championship was also completed, the final on November 9th ending: Faugh a Ballagh, 2-9; Sarsfield's, 2-5. This was actually the second competition in junior football, as a championship had been played under County Board auspices in 1900, won by Newcastle West Boers, who beat Kilmallock Rebels 2-10 to 1-4. This game was played at Feenagh on July 28th, 1901.

Appointed to the joint position of President and Treasurer of the Gaelic League Club at their annual meeting on March 16th, 1902, he assisted in the formation of the Geraldine Club the following year and was appointed Vice-President, the other officers being: President, Ald. McNeice; Treasurer, W. Duggan; Secretary, J. F. Ginnane; Captain, J. Ryan.

The Junior Leagues flourished and filled a long-felt want, whilst organisation in the city generally improved immensely all through the first decade of the new century, during most of which Charlie Holland remained at the junior helm.

Keen Rivalry.

Rivalry between city and county was fairly keen at this period and came to a head at the 1907 County Convention, when Charlie Holland opposed the outgoing chairman and great Gaelic worker, Willie Naughton of Bruff, for the County Board Presidency. A vote returned the Bruff man by 19 votes to 18, but on representation being made that some delegates were temporarily absent at the time a second vote was granted. This ended in Charlie's favour, 21 to 19. Most of the clubs that had opposed the re-vote then left the Convention and held a meeting of their own, at which they decided not to recognise the Board elected that day but to form a new one. A meeting for this purpose was held on April 6th, 1907, twenty clubs being represented, and the officers they appointed were: President, C. C. O'Rourke, Abbeyfeale; Vice-

President, J. McSweeney, Young Irelands; Trustees, M. Ryan and P. J. Hartnett; Secretary, Willie Naughton, Bruff.

Munster Council Forced to Intervene.

With two County Boards attempting to function, the Munster Council were forced to intervene and call another Convention, at which the differences were satisfactorily bridged. A few months later, when P. J. Hayes resigned his position as County Secretary, Charlie Holland was appointed to the post. He continued as chief executive officer for five years, during which Limerick came to the forefront of Munster hurling and won the championships for 1910 and 1911.

Both All-Ireland finals were controversial affairs. The one point decision that gave the 1910 verdict to Wexford was hotly contested by Limerick, who alleged many irregularities, but the Central Council upheld the referee's decision and the matter ended there. The 1911 final, fixed for Cork, was "washed out" by a rain-storm. The game was re-fixed for Thurles, but Limerick refused to play there, and when they persisted in their refusal, the governing body awarded a bloodless victory to Kilkenny. Later the officers of Limerick County Board were suspended for failing to field a team and Charlie Holland found himself with time on his hands, which he devoted to advancing the fortunes of Cloughaun Hurling Club, who soon came to the forefront to enjoy a wonderful spell of supremacy during which they won the County Senior titles for 1914, 1915, 1916 and 1918.

Great Years of the Middle Thirties.

Charlie returned to the County Board as Treasurer on March 31st, 1923, and spent the remainder of his days in advancing by every means at his disposal the fortunes of the G.A.A. in the County. During the late twenties he saw new attendance records made at attractive championship clashes in which great teams from Fedamore, Cloughaun, Croom, Newcastle West and Young Irelands figured. Then came Ahane as a new force in Limerick hurling, and quickly followed the glory years of the mid 'thirties, and the mighty deeds that left such an indelible mark in the story of hurling.

His death, on December 10th, 1939, although not unexpected, came as a great shock to those who had looked on him as an institution in Limerick Gaeldom during the long years when his house and services were freely at the disposal of any athletic or Gaelic project. The funeral was a remarkable tribute of love and affection, and included in the big cortege were Gaels from every part of the county anxious to pay their last respects to a great worker in the cause.

Touching Appreciation.

Many tributes were later paid his memory, and I quote from a touching appreciation by a colleague who knew him as co-worker over many long years:

"Close on two score years official of the Limerick G.A.A., the late Charlie Holland had very wide national interests. As straight as a rule in business and sport, he was very much loved despite his retiring disposition—maybe because of it. His G.A.A. outlook was individualistic and progressive. The schools and colleges, minors and juniors, held special interest for him.

"His main interest in life was to see that the games of the Gael and Irish traditions were carried on in a manner that was a credit to the land that gave him birth and in that respect he left behind him a reputation that will live among his friends as long as grass grows and the swish of the caman is heard on the playing fields of Ireland.

"Everything he did was devoted to the interests of his native land, and he always did his best to ensure that everything was carried out in the fairest possible way. He was a man who in private life lived the part he played in public and those of us who were associated with him and knew his very intimate knowledge of the rules will very sincerely miss him from our counsels. Indeed, his place in the hearts and counsel of the Gaels of Limerick will be very hard to fill.

Happy Recollections.

"I have very happy recollections of our associations with Charlie Holland and the part he played in helping us to guide our course in the right path, and also in helping to keep our traditions alive in the hearts of the people. He preserved in every way the traditions of Irish home and Irish life and as such we revere his memory. A native of Cork, we in Limerick will always remember Charlie Holland, who will hold the same endearing place in our memories, for we will always remember him as a sincere and honest Gael who throughout his life always stood for the cause of an Irish Ireland.

"A man upright in purpose with no guile whatsoever, his wish was that the affairs of the Association should be carried out as he tried in his own way to carry them out—above board, honestly and sincerely. The G.A.A. has lost one of its pillars by his death. He was one of the men whom they would always miss. His words, always gentle, were yet full of force, full of meaning, and full of sincerity."

A Great Gael.

And I cannot do better than conclude with some extracts from an article on his career that appeared some years ago in "The Gael in Action":

"To know Charlie Holland was to know a great Gael in the really big sense of the term. His official connection with the G.A.A. goes back many a long day, even before some of us were born. In fact, I heard my father tell how Charlie was a pillar of strength to the then flourishing Gaelic League Club in the very early days of the century, and as Secretary of same was often to be seen late of a Saturday night ensuring that his players would be ready for the morrow. Later he was very actively associated with the Commercials Club, whilst his connection with the famous Cloughaun Club is too well known and appreciated by present-day Gaels to need any words of mine. "But it is in the wider field of activity that his services

proved of wonderful benefit to Limerick Gaeldom. When he became 'Chancellor' of the local Exchequer he brought the county from a very lowly position to a proud place, and anybody familiar with the large amount of work necessary in connection with G.A.A. activity in later years will not fail to appreciate the time and care Charlie expended on Gaelic matters.

Served the Native Games Devotedly.

"To those of us who knew the man intimately for what he was worth as a man—honest, outspoken and upright, and as one of the old-time workers in the cause—it was with an astounding emphasis of poignancy that we saw the clay close round his grave; for Charlie was a Gael who, in his generation and ours, served the native pastimes devotedly. Then we knew for a certainty that his kindly, warm, generous heart had ceased to beat, and that we would know him no more on this earth, or find him as an actual co-worker in the cause he so resolutely espoused.

"Charlie Holland was with the Gaelic Athletic Association from his youth. He saw it weather many a storm and face and live through many days of adversity. There were days of darkness and disappointment that tried the courage, resource and patriotism of the brave men who kept aloft the flag of the G.A.A. when its coffers were empty, its friends few and its critics many. He was bred and born in the traditions of the Gael, and men will come and men will go, but honest, straight-thinking, plain-spoken Charlie Holland will be long remembered.

No. 88—Michael Corbett of Barrigone.