

No. 143 **ANTHONY MACKKEY of Castleconnell**

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

CASTLECONNELL was very much to the fore in its support of things Gaelic, around the period when the G.A.A. was formed, and one of the greatest hurling tournaments of the infant days of the Association was that organised for the famous Castleconnell Cup. This attracted a great entry and they played six or eight matches a day in order to decide that competition in anything like reasonable time.

One of the big figures amongst the many active workers in the Castleconnell parish at the time was Anthony Mackey. He toiled with such interest and enthusiasm that his name soon was a household one as a Gaelic worker far beyond the confines of the parish, and when the formation of a County Board was decided upon he was unanimously chosen by the Gaels of Limerick to preside at the first meeting.

PRESSED TO ACCEPT THE CHAIRMANSHIP.

At that convention the assembled delegates pressed him strongly to accept the chairmanship. He declined the honour because of his close association with the Castleconnell Club, but proposed instead the name of Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty"), a man of strong nationalist views, who, he felt, would guide the new organisation along the lines intended by its founders.

Mr. O'Brien, who was a member of the Clan na Gael Club, was elected, and Mr. Michael Looney became first secretary. Anthony, however, agreed to represent Limerick on the Central Council—a post he filled with such distinction that the clubs of the whole country eventually appointed him to the responsible position of national treasurer—not that the G.A.A. of the time had a lot of money to worry about.

INVITED TO CLARE'S FIRST CONVENTION.

Even before he attended his first Central Council meeting, Anthony's leadership was recognised and the Gaels of Clare invited him to their first Convention, which he attended on February 14th, 1887, delivering a stirring address to the delegates.

A fortnight later he was present at his first Central Council meeting, held at Wynne's Hotel, Dublin, and at which the draws for the first All-Ireland hurling and football championships were made. Only twelve counties entered, the draws resulting: Wicklow v. Clare, Wexford v. Galway, Dublin v. Tipperary, Cork v. Kilkenny, Waterford v. Louth, Limerick v. Meath. It will be noted that Kerry was the only Munster county missing.

Within the Association a great battle was raging between the physical force men and the leaders of the constitutional section, and Anthony sided with the former, who included well known figures like Pat Hasset of Ahane, P. N. Fitzgerald of Cork, Pat Hocht and John Colman of Newport, Frank Dinneen of Ballylanders and Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty").

INFLUENCE OF THE GROUP.

That the influence of this group was gaining ground on the executive was evident from a decision of the Central Council meeting mentioned above, which decided that members of the R.I.C. be not eligible for membership of any affiliated club "in consequence of their action towards the people of Ireland on almost every occasion they have been brought into contact with them."

It is interesting to note that this meeting was presided over by one of the seven original founders of the G.A.A.—the late Mr. J. K. Bracken, of Kilmallock, whose son, now Viscount Bracken was a Cabinet Minister in Britain's Wartime Government. That meeting also ruled that no tournament be permitted in any county without the sanction of the county committee.

The President of the Association Mr. Maurice Davin, was unable to attend that meeting. When he learned of the decision re tournaments he made a spirited protest

and stated that he completely disagreed with the regulation and requested that it be not enforced. The Central Council at its next meeting refused to rescind the resolution and Davin resigned from the Presidency.

ON EXECUTIVE DURING STIRRING PERIOD.

Anthony Mackey served on the Executive during a stirring period. The Association was experiencing a heavy dose of "growing pains" and numerous disputes marked the early years of its existence.

When Pat Hasset of Ahane was elected Treasurer of the Council he had the backing of Anthony Mackey, and of the Irish Republican Brotherhood organisation, who were strongly behind the G.A.A. and anxious to maintain their influence on its executive.

The executive were apparently a body of strong willed men, and in their efforts to enforce discipline they joined issue with many powerful units of the organisation. Some clubs were suspended, others expelled, and a tempest of irritation rose against the governing body.

One of the greatest sensations was the demand for the resignation of secretary and founder Michael Cusack.

The executive also decided to publish a newspaper which would be the official organ of the Association, and shortly afterwards "The Gael" appeared, but its existence was short-lived.

The Central Council manfully upheld its authority against all comers, but when the important and powerful "Freeman's Journal" Club fell foul of the executive a serious situation looked like developing.

DR. CROKE'S OFFER TURNED DOWN.

The Archbishop of Cashel, Most Rev. Dr. Croke, who was patron of the Association, intervened and offered to act as arbitrator, as did also Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell.

The Central Council, however, insisted on their right to administer the rules, and refused to accept any compromise or to recede from the position they had taken up.

A man of advanced views in politics, and a believer in physical force methods of advancing the Irish cause, Anthony and several other members of the executive holding similar views found themselves in violent conflict with other members of the organisation who believed in a constitutional means of dealing with the political situation as it then was.

It will be agreed that many troubles beset the infant G.A.A. in the first year of Anthony's association with the Central Council. The latter, however, it must be admitted, faced up to the difficulties with courage and resolution. Insubordination was vigorously crushed, discipline insisted upon, and the foundations securely laid for the great national organisation we know to-day.

HISTORIC CONGRESS AT THURLES.

The strongly expressed national views of the executive, the grievances, real or imaginary, of those against whom disciplinary action was necessary, and many other factors piled up hostility against the Central Council, with the result that the annual congress held at Thurles on November 9th, 1887, proved one of the greatest and most historic in the story of the G.A.A.

Anthony Mackey has left a picture of that mighty gathering of 1,600 delegates, the greatest ever recorded at a G.A.A. Convention. This is how he described the exciting scenes in the densely packed Courthouse:—

"We had no President because Maurice Davin had resigned and a bitter fight developed over the appointment of a Chairman.

"The name of P. N. Fitzgerald of Cork, long associated with the physical force party, was pro-

posed. Father Scanlan of Nenagh opposed and suggested Major Kelly of Moycarkey. Heated scenes followed, as several delegates tried to speak together. The crowd swayed backwards and forwards and for over an hour a wordy battle was fought amidst very great confusion and repeated cheers and counter cheers.

"Most of the seats and other fittings were battered to matchwood by the swaying crowds and eventually Father Scanlan, followed by a number of clergymen and nearly two hundred delegates, left the hall and proceeded to hold a rival meeting elsewhere.

BAD SPLIT APPEARED INEVITABLE.

"Meanwhile, we carried on as best we could, and elected E. H. Bennett, of Newmarket-on-Fergus, President of the Association, by 316 votes, against 210 cast for Maurice Davin. A bad split appeared inevitable, but Archbishop Croke stepped into the breach. He invited Michael Davitt and Maurice Davin to a conference in Thurles, Davitt having previously interviewed P. N. Fitzgerald.

"The I.R.B., most anxious that the G.A.A. should become not only a great athletic association but a virile national force, secretly instructed its members to withdraw rather than damage the Association, and when a new congress assembled at Thurles in early January, 1888, the reconstruction proposals were adopted and unity restored."

Several of the old Executive lost their places on the Council, including Anthony Mackey, who was replaced by Rev. Eugene Sheehy, P.P. But twelve months later the Castleconnell man was back—this time as Treasurer of the Association—to play no mean part in the development of the Organisation.

17th Nov 24/1956