

No. 120—TER MANGAN of Croom

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

MENTION of the Mangans inevitably brings to mind the Croom Club, which shed such lustre on the G.A.A. in the early years of the century.

An old Croom veteran, who played with Croom against Young Ireland in the semi-final of a silver cup tournament as far back as 1901, recalls the earliest game recorded as having been played by the Croom lads, although hurling was strong in the district from the infant days of the G.A.A. and Croom was represented on the Kilfinane side that won the first All-Ireland senior hurling crown for Shannonside away back in 1897. Pat Buskin was the Croom man in that great Garryowen victory, and it is a pleasure to know that he is still hale and hearty—a grand link with the glory days when Kilfinane were such a magnificent force in the Gaelic life of Limerick—hitting the high spots in world athletics, as well as moving to the fore in the realms of All-Ireland hurling. Croom had a worthy link with that first Limerick Blue Riband, and it is the proud boast of the men from the Maigue that other men from the district were nobly associated with almost every other Garryowen bid for hurling glory.

GREAT HURLERS.

Mick Feely, Mick and Ter. Mangan were on the team that narrowly lost to Wexford in 1910. Garrett Howard won three All-Irelands with Limerick (1921, 1934 and 1936) and two with Dublin (1924 and 1927) to become the proud holder of the greatest number of All-Ireland hurling medals ever won by a son of Sarsfield's County; Jim Roche won three golden trophies (1934, 1936 and 1940); Tom Mangan and Mick Mullane were on the 1921 winning fifteen; Jackie O'Connell won in 1934, and Peter Craggan brought the thirteenth medal to the parish when he accompanied Jim Roche on the 1940 team.

The old veteran recalled them all through the salt tears of a memory for the Croom which he fears is gone never to return. He helped them fight oftentimes for the honour of the old parish, for the name of the hurling blood, for the memory never forgotten of a hard-won triumph, for the bitterness of cruel defeat, for the glory ever green of half a dozen years of county renown. And then, he remembered the quiet firesides by the swirling Maigue, the gentle women that kept the fires burning at home as the hurlers travelled to venues near and far; the happy nights spent around the same firesides, playing again in memory some of the great games of a wonderful era, or recalling the grand heroes of the unforgettable days that are past and gone forever.

PROUD YEARS.

Croom surely had its proud years of hurling glory but the old stalwart had other memories also. "Oh, God be good to the men, and God be with the days," he murmured, as he recalled the stories told him by his father of the wonderful games played in Croom in the early Gaelic days. One particular occasion stands out in bold relief. Croom the hosting place for the greatest gathering of Gaels ever to assemble in any County, Limerick venue—the date, May 15th, 1888, the occasion, the senior Hurling and Football Championship finals of the previous year—South Liberties v.

Murroe in hurling; Commercial v. St. Michael's in football. Six special trains ran from the City alone that day of days.

The ghosts of the past must surely haunt the old hosting place where so many of the great teams of other days did championship battle. It would be like the litany of the dead men to mention all the great ones that played there but one game, often spoken of still, brought the Abbeyfeale footballers to Croom to play Oola, I think. Abbeyfeale travelled by train to Patrickswell, and led by their then famous Brass and Reed Band marched to Croom, with the great Father Casey at their head.

VIVID MEMORIES.

One memory calls up hosts of others as far as Croom is concerned, and many of my readers will have still vivid memories of a later era by the Maigue when the great field there was the scene of some lively County Championship games, and a few inter-county matches that merit special remembrance.

No wonder the old veteran was sad as he recalled the stirring days of youth, remembered again the great hostings of after years—the crowded touchlines, the cheers that echoed and re-echoed, the hurling heroes, the visitors from all the great hurling centres of Ireland, the rival colours, the beggars, the ballad singers, the musicians, the brown stout and brave talk flowing so freely afterwards—and then wondered what had happened the grand days that brought such happiness to all. He sighed, as many another old veteran must, for the Croom that was, and hoped that scattered somewhere through the new generations would be some remnants of the heroes of old—the rearguard as it were of past days of glory—who would yet win back for Croom its heritage both as a hurlers' home and the venues of the great games of Limerick.

SIX MANGAN BROTHERS HURLED FOR CROOM.

Ter Mangan was one of six brothers, all of whom handled the caman for Croom. Johnny played with the old Croom team and the others—Tom, Mick, Ter, Pat and Jim—oftentimes played on the same team. The Mangans were a very important part of Croom in their day, and it is on record also that the team oftentimes trained on their land at Carass. The training muster was usually a strong one, oftentimes exceeding the two score mark, yet Mrs. Mangan, with real old Irish hospitality, would insist on all having tea with the result that the happy home was the scene of many a grand hurling gathering and the stories and the fun sometimes went well into the night.

Ter. Mangan was one of Limerick's greatest hurlers during what might be described as the Castleconnell era (1909-1913) and in later years with his native parish club.

Looking back now, I find first mention of Ter. when he played with the Croom team that beat Rathkeale 3-9 to 3-6 for the 1908 West Limerick final at Croagh on the 8th November of that year. They later beat Caherline, 2-6 to 0-4, for their first county title, and had a notable triumph three weeks later when they defeated the pick of Limerick City by 5-12 to 1-2 in a contest in aid of the Father Casey Memorial Fund.

They also won the Murphy Cup two years in succession (1908 and 1909) but were beaten by Castle-

connell (9-12 to 3-10) in the 1909 County Championship final. The new champions immediately recognised the worth of Ter. Mangan and he was selected for the inter-county contest v. Cork—the Munster hurling thriller played at Tralee on the 16th October, 1910.

A GREAT STRUGGLE.

This was as great a struggle as any waged for the southern hurling crown, with Limerick emerging victorious to the great surprise of most hurling followers. Four weeks later the new champions crossed camans with Wexford for the Blue Riband, and were very unlucky to suffer defeat by the minimum margin. The Shannonsiders consider to this day they were unfairly treated on that occasion.

However, nothing daunted, they again came out on top in Munster the following year, defeating Tipperary in a whirlwind finish at Cork in the provincial final, but were again unlucky, as they conceded a walk-over to Kilkenny in the All-Ireland decider, following a dispute over the venue for same.

Limerick's inter-county greatness faded for a short period, but in 1913 they were again prominent and on the 18th May beat Tipperary 4-0 to 3-1 after a wonderful nificent Thomond Shield.

Nine weeks later one of Limerick's greatest triumphs came when they defeated the famous Kilkenny fifteen, 5-2 to 4-1, for the Cardinal Agliardi Medals. This was a splendid victory, more especially when it is realised that the Kilkenny men were then at the height of their glory in a period during which they secured seven All-Ireland titles in the ten years from 1904 to 1913—a feat that may never be equalled. Croom had charge of the Limerick selection on that memorable occasion.

A LEAN PERIOD.

Then followed a lean period in Limerick's fortunes, and it was not until 1920 that we find Croom again figuring in the winning championship list. In that year they won out in the 1919 competition, beating Rathkeale after a drawn struggle in their divisional final and disposing of Fedamore, by the odd point in seven, for the County decider. This victory they repeated on two subsequent occasions—on the 20th May, 1923, in the Fr. Connolly Gold Medals final by 5-3 to 4-2; and on 15th March, 1925, in the 1924 County final.

The Westerners were again divisional champions in 1927, but lost to their old rivals—Fedamore—in the final clash. Two years later, as Western Champions, they again contested a county final, and on this occasion were victorious—the defeated fifteen being Cappamore.

Following this success, Ter Mangan retired from active participation, after more than two score years connection with many of the great events which have helped to make Limerick G.A.A. history. His retirement was a severe loss to the Croom Club and the Association, as he also gave good service as a referee, and here, too, his loss was felt.

However, he continued to take an active interest in the fortunes of his club and county, and his advice and assistance were always available when needed, to help the young blood in their efforts to emulate the great deeds of their forbears.

Although in failing health for some time, his untimely death in mid-November, 1934, came as a great shock to his legion of friends and admirers.