

# No. 154—MICK MURPHY of Young Irelands

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

**M**ICK MURPHY, the famous Limerick goalkeeper of nearly two score years ago, and one of the best known hurlers in Ireland in his time, is no more. Last week, he was involved in a fatal motor accident near Galway, and the hero of many a great game sleeps his last sleep in Sligo, his adopted home.

News of the tragic death of Mick Murphy came as a profound shock to his legion of friends in Limerick, who remember him as one of the most colourful of members of a great team, and associate with his name many memories of a magnificent era in the story of the game by the Shannonside.

From his boyhood, Mick revelled in the hurling game. His enthusiasm for it was manifest in his very early association with the old St. Patrick's club, of which he was both a useful and a very ardent member.

### THE LATE JOHN COLLOPY

In recalling that grand sporting combination, one of the best of its day in junior ranks, it would be impossible to omit mention of the late John Collopy, who might be termed the very life and soul of the St. Patricks of those care-free days.

John, an employee of Glynn's, literally spent almost his entire earnings in furthering the interests of St. Patricks. Unmarried, he was nevertheless father to one of the largest families in Limerick. The young lads he gathered about him in St. Patricks were something closer than even sons, if that were possible. They loved him with an intense love, and when one got into any kind of trouble or difficulties, he immediately made for him, confident he had a friend, willing to risk anything for his beloved boys.

The rivalry between St. Patricks and Claughaun was very pronounced during those years. The Claughaun lads were at the peak of their hurling power and influence, but "Saints," although only rated a Junior club, often gave them a closer call in Murphy Cup and like competitions than the senior teams of the county were able to offer. For a time both trained together, but eventually a break had to be made, and "Saints" secured a pitch of their own—again provided by John Collopy, as was the wherewithal for many an excursion to outside venues for their various engagements.

### DIED FIGHTING FOR IRELAND

Like many another pure-souled Gael, John Collopy had a great love for his native land—a love he inculcated in the lads under his care. Always in the thick of the fight for national independence, he died fighting for Ireland, in the assault on Newcastle R.I.C. Barracks, and it was the melancholy duty of a group of his beloved St. Patricks boys to carry away his body and secretly bury it, lest it should fall into the hands of the British, to gloat over the passing of a brave soldier of freedom. The group around that shallow, lonely grave, their task completed with loving hands, had to turn quickly away, but few mourners left with heavier hearts, to carry through life's journey, be it long or short, the beautiful memory of John Collopy's acquaintance.

Mick Murphy was one of that devoted band that comprised the St. Patricks of those stirring days, and he had as team mates, another great hurler of all Ireland fame, star forward, Bob McConkey, and Con Browner, who took such a prominent part in the administrative affairs of the Limerick G.A.A. in later years.

### EXCITING GAMES

Despite the restricted opportunities of the times, St. Patricks figured to advantage in many exciting games, and were considered very unlucky to go down before Pallas in a vital Junior Champion-

ship tie. But they had many proud victories, and none wore the old colours with such distinction as did the subject of this sketch.

That the national spirit was uppermost in the ranks was personified too, in Mick Murphy, for he was aggressively Irish in his outlook, and on a few occasions actually displayed more courage than good sense, as many of the more timid would assert, in his dealings with the armed forces of the British Crown.

On one such day, "Saints" were playing a hurling match in Thomondgate and a number of police turned up there on some unknown mission. Anyway, their presence was resented by the teams and in the dispute that followed Mick "flattened" half a dozen of them with his hurley, an action that would have meant certain death to him, if repeated twelve months later.

That the intensification of the fight mattered little in his attitude to the army of occupation was illustrated by an incident in which he was implicated at Cork, on Sunday, 8th August, 1920, when British terrorism was at its height.

### THE RAILWAYS HAD CEASED TO FUNCTION

The railways had ceased to function, due to the patriotic and plucky action of the railway employees, who refused to carry members of the British armed forces. Limerick were fixed to play Tipperary, at Cork, and the team travelled by char-a-banc.

It was the memorable week-end that a liner carrying the great Archbishop Mannix was held up in mid-ocean, and the whole force of the British Navy employed to prevent His Grace of Melbourne landing in Ireland for a visit to his aged mother, near Rath Luirc.

The Limerick team and officials wore the colours of the Archbishop, but they were intercepted at Rath Luirc, where the military removed the colours by force. And they were so busy doing this that they failed to find two revolvers carried by Mick Murphy and Jimmie Humphries.

The military authorities banned the game in Cork, and whilst the Munster Council sent a decoy crowd with dozens of jarveys to the Athletic Grounds, where the Tans stood guard, Willie Walsh of Waterford whistled the teams into action before a fine crowd at Riverstown, where Limerick won, 5-7 to 3-3.

### HOTEL INCIDENT

Back in Cork that night the Tans were very active, and in a street running by the side of the Victoria Hotel were causing considerable annoyance to passers-by. It was then that Mick Murphy opened a bedroom window and dropped to the street below the jug filled with water then to be found in every hotel bedroom. There was consternation for a moment, before the British Forces raced into the hotel and marched out all the occupants, many being roughly treated. But Mick was nowhere to be found.

When Mick Murphy and Bob McConkey were picked on the County team, they found it necessary to join a senior club. It was a big wrench parting with their beloved St. Patrick's, but they had the satisfaction of playing a big part in bringing their new club, Young Irelands, to the forefront—so much so that the lads in blue and gold qualified for the 1917 County senior hurling final, only to be beaten rather sensationally by a little fancied Newcastle West side.

### THE ALL-IRELAND CROWN

But a number of the Young Ireland lads had the great satisfaction of later figuring on the Newcastle West selection that recaptured the All-Ireland crown, after a lapse of twenty-one years. And Mick and Bob shared in that great victory—so easily gained, however, that a Dublin daily afterwards published a cartoon depicting Mick Murphy standing against his goal-posts, hands in his coat pockets.

and underneath it the words—"The Limerick goalie gets stagnation."

But it was not always so with Mick, and on many occasions he played one of the leading parts on the team, often standing between Limerick and defeat by the sheer brilliance of his work between the posts.

Mick won two All-Irelands with Limerick, and it is certain that but for his transfer from the County at least one further title would be numbered in the ones that now stand to the credit of Shannonside.

With Young Ireland he also shone in many great engagements, and besides County Championship medals he won numerous Tournament trophies, some gained against the greatest club teams then in Ireland.

### MEMORABLE DECIDER

He was Munster goalkeeper in the first, and greatest, of the finals played for the Railway Cup—way back in 1927—a decider that will never be forgotten by the thousands who had the good fortune to witness it.

A great net minder, his clearances were forceful and carrying wonderful relief to a hard pressed defence. Full of courage, it was heaven help the forward that charged in on him with ugly intent. Enough to say, he was rarely the victim of a second charge.

Mick always retained a great love for his first club, St. Patrick's. I remember the occasion of a Young Ireland Club meeting, held under the old stand in the Markets Field. The Young Ireland President, Jimmy Fitzgerald, complained that a number of clubs were "up against" Young Ireland. Mick Murphy insisted that St. Patrick's be left out of any such reference, and very forcibly carried his point. "We came to Young Ireland and made a team of it, and nobody will run down St. Patrick's in my presence," he declared.

In common with many Young Ireland men, I mourn the loss of a dear friend, and join with his hosts of admirers in tendering heartfelt sympathy to Mick Murphy's relatives in their hour of great sorrow. Suaineas Siorraí da anam!

29.10.55