

No. 174—PADDY NASH of Limerick City

IN search of data concerning events in the early years of the G.A.A., I came across a little booklet issued in 1902 by the League of Dublin Hurling Clubs, and in which much mention is made of the work for Gaelic games of a Limerick City man—the late Paddy Nash, who figured prominently in the Metropolis at a time when it was far from fashionable to be a Gael.

Looking through the booklet, I met a score and more of names, around each of which clustered a garland of happy memories, saddened in many cases by the realisation that death had supervened to make them no more than echoes from the tomb, and echoes which had grown very faint.

ERA OF INTENSE GAELIC LIFE.

The all recalled an era of intense Gaelic life in Dublin, incidents associated with a long period of alternative stress and triumph, confident hopes, chilling set-backs and exhilarating victories. Few of these men got a lot of the limelight—it did not shine very brightly on Gaelic happenings of that time—and then their energies were almost entirely concentrated upon work within their reach—the routine job of education, enlistment and concentration. The success of that work, however, halting as it may have been, was sufficient reward to them. It was practically all the recompense they could hope for, though a few found scope for their experience and enthusiasm in wider fields of Gaelic and national life.

The man who conceived the idea of the Hurling League was Dr. Proinnsias De Burca. He set the move on foot and, despite the opposition of many, including the Dublin Senior Board of the time, who frowned on the project and gave it scant encouragement, he proceeded with his plans, and would have been the League's first President had he remained in Dublin. His idea persisted and eventually prevailed, and the first President was, appropriately enough, the Limerickman Paddy Nash, who had been Dr. de Burca's most ardent aide in its advocacy.

HEROIC WORK.

Paddy Nash, then connected with the Rapparee Hurling Club in Dublin, an organisation closely associated with the activities of the '98 clubs, did heroic work for native games, and for the G.A.A. in gen-

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eral, during his all too brief life. No other word than heroic could be applied to his labours in the Gaelic and national cause, because they were invariably crowned with success and were carried on in face of many disabilities, not the least of which was very indifferent health.

The great revival that followed the establishment of the League, in Dublin, was marred by the absence of suitable enclosed grounds—a difficulty still experienced in many large centres, despite half a century's endeavour in this direction. In the early days in the Metropolis, Clonturk Park was the principal venue for Gaelic inter-County contests, and many thrilling games were witnessed there. It was one of the greatest blunders of the Association in those days that this natural arena, superior to the Croke Park expanse in every respect, was lost.

COULD HAVE BEEN GOT FOR A SONG.

It could have been purchased for the proverbial song, and equipped for the price of the chorus. Gaelic affairs were badly mismanaged in those years, and Clonturk passed out of reach, to eventually go to the builder, who quickly dissected the once splendid natural arena.

The League workers strove valiantly to provide the grounds, and tried every means to force the County Board to action on this vital matter.

There is a story, or record of an incident at a meeting of the Board, where Michael Cusack, the founder of the Association, was having some criticism from members of the then "New Progressive Party" on the Executive, the "Party" being composed of a few young members, who thought that certain duties were being too long deferred.

Cusack defended the conduct of the Board, and he thus drew upon himself the fire of the leaders of the "progressive reformers," notably Paddy Nash, Jack Swan and another Limerickman, Michael F. Crowe. Crowe and Swan were Cusack's most trenchant critics, but they were getting back just as good as they gave. Though, critically, well sprinkled with sarcasm in retort, it was a good-humoured battle of wits, and Cusack seemed to be getting a bit tired of it.

THIRD SHANNONSIDERS.

Hearing the door of the room opening and looking towards it, the veteran beheld the big proportions of a third Shannonsider, J. J. Keane (the famous Geraldine player, later Chairman of the old G.A.A. Athletic Council, and afterwards Chairman of the N.A.C.A. and Director of Aonach Tailteann) entering the room, and called out: "Oh, Keane! 'Tis time you came to my assistance and to save me from the feathered tribes, the swans and the crows!"

The laughter evoked by Cusack's dramatic declaration brought peace and harmony to the meeting.

"Bricks and Mortar" led to the abandonment of another early ground, at Harold's Cross; the Sarsfield pitch at Terenure was also annexed by the builders, but the County Board, after much trouble, secured a fine ground, also in the Terenure district. It was suitably equipped and laid out, but a bombshell exploded after a couple of months tenancy, as a number of local residents, holding strict Sabatarian views, got together and persuaded the owner to terminate the tenancy.

BRITISH BOARD OF WORKS.

Trouble arose, too, with the British Board of Works and evidence of hostility, on the part of the powers that controlled that Board, to the growing popularity of the G.A.A., was manifested in those years when prosecutions, at the instance of the Board of Works, were launched against a number of Dublin hurlers for practising on the nine acres. The County Board entered a defence to the summonses on the issue that the Phoenix Park was ostensibly a public park, provided as a recreation grounds for the citizens generally—irrespective of creed or class.

The decision, as was only to be expected at that time, went against the Gaels. The national pastimes were excluded from the nine acres and the players, perforce, relegated to the section between the main road and the Liffey.

Paddy Nash's work for the League clubs was not without recognition, and we soon find him a stimulating spirit in the County Board, and an untiring ally of the late Walter Hanrahan in organising the Leinster counties.

His activities in connection with the '98 clubs in Dublin and in organising the Emmet Commemoration there in 1903 knew no respite. Concurrently his activities over a wide area in the I.R.B. were equally zealous and fruitful.

GLOWING TRIBUTE.

It was unfortunate that Paddy should die before the first harvest of his joint sowing reached maturity in the glorious Easter of 1916. On the occasion of his passing "Vigilant" penned this tribute:—

"Ireland has produced many brave sons whose lives have shed lustre on the race of the Gael, but not one of them all had a deeper lover for the land that begot him than this unassuming but warm-hearted son of Banba. The date of our first meeting on a Gaelic field goes back a goodly stretch now, but in all that time I knew him to stand for nothing but manhood and independence—honest, fearless, manly, generous and true. To him, principal was everything, and having convinced himself of the justice of a cause, it mattered not how many enemies he made for himself in working to bring that cause to a successful issue. Hard hitter that he could be in a fight, yet he was thoroughly incapable of harbouring hate or envy against any man, and I have met few more free from the tinge of malice, for there was nothing suggestive of meanness or the little mind in his word or action. From early years he was connected with the Gaelic Athletic Association, and he was among the vanguard who worked for its advancement. By his death Gaeldom lost one of its brightest spirits and most unselfish workers. After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well beneath the green grass of Limerick, but his memory will not soon fade from the minds of all who knew him."

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