

No. 209—Jim Reidy of Ballingarry

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

LIMERICK hearts everywhere must have surged with pride last Sunday night when listening to the excellent broadcast of the St. Brendan Cup games from the Polo Grounds, New York, to hear mention of Shannonside players, prominent in the ranks of the exiles.

The greatest goal of an exciting and closely contested hurling game came from a brilliant wing put by Ralph Prendergast, the former Cloughaun and County star; whilst Jimmy O'Grady of Newcastle West and Kevin Long of Feenagh-Kilmeedy were others to figure prominently in keeping the New York lads so close on the heels of Tipperary, O'Grady getting the opening home goal and paving the way for McLysaght's rasper in the dying seconds of the best hurling game witnessed yet between a home and visiting side, whilst Kevin Long had New York's second point, and in the closing stages sent a great drive that narrowly missed the net.

WEST LIMERICK STAR FOOTBALLERS.

Eddie O'Sullivan of Ballyhahill played a captain's part on the New York football team and landed one of the great goals of the game besides figuring in many hectic raids that put the home crowd wild with excitement. Aided by brother Mickey, this grand West Limerick pair of star footballers made some beautiful openings for Dr. Pdraig Carney. They tired, however, in the closing stages and it was then Galway succeeded in getting up the steam which eventually carried them to a glorious if hard earned victory.

This Limerick brilliance in both codes will be hailed at home with real satisfaction, demonstrating as it does the adherence to native games of these true sons of Sarsfield's County, who carried the ideals of the Gael to exile with them, and upheld the best traditions of their native land on "far foreign fields," just as the soldiers of Limerick, who joined the Irish Brigade, did on the fields of Fontenoy and elsewhere, when the foreign foe drove them from the homeland.

THE AMERICAN "INVASION" OF 1888.

From the first plucky effort of the then infant G.A.A.—the American "Invasion" of 1888—Limerick men have been prominent on hurling, football and athletic fields in the new world. The "Invasion" sides included the following Limerick athletes: Dr. J. C. Daly of Dromin (who broke the American record for slinging the 56 lbs.), Willie Real (Pallasgreen), Dan Shanahan, Jack McCarthy, Mick and Jack Connery, all of Kilfinane, with hurler Dan Godfrey, of Murroe.

Scores of Limerick men made their mark on the American athletic stage in after years, notably John Flanagan, Paddy Ryan, Paddy and Con Leahy, Dan and Tim Ahearne—and a very dear friend, Jim Fahy, of Galbally, who recently mastered a severe illness with the grit and determination which won for him world laurels so often in the golden days of a youth which unfortunately could not last for ever.

About the period of the American "Invasion" three brothers were growing to manhood at the foot of Knockfierna, near the "Garden Town" of Ballingarry, who gave promise of a bright future on Irish athletic fields.

Shy and retiring though he was, the subject of our sketch this week, Jim Reidy, was the leader who rallied the local lads in the Ballingarry parish, and founded the G.A.A. there, soon establishing a successful hurling team, of which he himself was one of the best players.

A beautiful specimen of manhood, standing over six feet, with grand broad shoulders and built to measure, he had fleetness of foot, and the typical use of wrist and eye that marked him a hurler of much merit. His brother, Ned, was, too, an outstanding hurler—a distinct asset to any team, while the third member of the family, brother John, hit the hurling high lights so strongly with Ballingarry that he gained his place on the Kilfinane selection which won

the All-Ireland and Croke Park titles in 1897.

HIS BROTHER JOHN.

John Reidy was goalkeeper on that great side, and we have it on the reliable authority of many veterans of the period that his brother Jim might have figured on the 21 with him had he not emigrated to America in June, 1896, when he was at the zenith of his hurling prowess and just 23 years of age.

Before crossing the Atlantic with Jim, we will have a last look at John, who continued to shine on the hurling field. He was an inspiration in rallying much of West Limerick to the standard of hurling, and who also lent his invaluable aid to the propagation and control of the games in the Councils of the G.A.A., having filled some important executive positions for club and county before his untimely death at the early age of thirty-three in 1910.

Jim Reidy found little outlet for his hurling enthusiasm in the New York of sixty years ago. Irish athletes had made their impress on the American scene but it was to be many years before the hurling game gained a firm foothold.

JOINED CLANN-NA-GAEL.

On his arrival in the New World, Jim went to work on a farm owned by his uncle at White Plains. He immediately made contact with his fellow exiles, and in a matter of a few weeks he was admitted a member of the local club of the Clan-na-Gael organisation, of which he remained a loyal and staunch member for the remainder of his life.

Two years later he was a delegate to the National Convention of the Organisation, and from that date few conventions were held at which he was not present.

Always keenly interested in journalistic affairs, Jim realised a cherished ambition in 1900 when he was appointed Editor of a weekly newspaper in New Rochelle, New York. He also became local correspondent from the Westchester district for an influential New York City daily paper.

On the outbreak of the Boer War, he took sides against the ancient enemy of his race, and in 1902 we find him Secretary of the American Society of Freedom, which was in reality a pro-Boer Committee, having its headquarters in New York. He gave valuable service to this organisation and was a member of its Executive Council.

FRIENDSHIP WITH JOHN DEVOY.

That same year (1902) he opened a friendship with John Devoy, which was only severed by the death of the great patriot. Closely associated for more than quarter of a century with Devoy's work, he became assistant Editor of the well known journal, the "Gaelic American," a post which he continued to hold for many years following John's death.

Mindful of Devoy's wish that his bones should rest in Irish soil, Jim Reidy was chief organiser and secretary of the committee which arranged the transfer of his body to Ireland for burial in Glasnevin, in June, 1929. Incidentally, that was the last occasion Jim visited the homeland, his previous trips being in 1907 and 1910.

Through his close association

with Devoy, the Ballingarry man got on intimate terms with prominent Irish Republicans throughout the United States and Canada, and was on terms of the closest friendship with many of the 1916 leaders, notably Tom Clarke, Pdraig Pearse, Sean McDermott and Major McBride.

Jim Reidy lived to become one of the most trusted men in the Clan na Gael Organisation, and it is no secret that his advice and counsel were regularly sought by the leaders of the Republican movement.

OTHER ACTIVITIES.

He also belonged to and was the driving force in the United Irish American Societies, was very active in the Irish Republican Brotherhood Veterans' Association and the Limerick Men's Association of New York, and was a member of the Executive Council of the American Irish Historical Society.

Jim Reidy had a superb mind, and was regarded by those who knew him as one of the great newspaper writers of his time. As a contributor on Irish matters he had no superior—in fact, he had no equal—and his old mentor, John Devoy, had always his opinion on serious matters.

Speaking at a meeting of Clan na Gael in New York shortly before his death some five years ago, Jim Reidy left this fine message to his countrymen, at home and across the seas:—

"We Irish, and we particularly of the Clan na Gael, are heirs to a great heritage—the heritage of the unconquerable men of Ireland of the long-gone generations, who did not know the meaning of the word surrender. We are the heirs of Tone and the United Irishmen, of the Young Irelanders, and the oldest members were the trusted co-workers of the Fenians and of the heroes and martyrs of Ireland's historic Easter Week of 1916.

A GREAT PRIVILEGE.

"God has blessed the survivors of the Clan by letting them live to see, from afar off, the dawning of the day in Erin. That great privilege was denied to tens of thousands of the older members, who were gathered into the eternal harvest before the dawn came, but they cherished to the end the hope, which we have seen gloriously realised, that, under God, and in His own good time, Ireland was destined to be free. Let us count our blessings and thank the Eternal Ruler of the Universe, whose Divine Hand has been manifest in Irish history in our lifetime, guarding, directing and aiding our people. With trust in Him, let us, co-operating with other good men and women of the race, move forward to that final victory, which will be attained when the flag of the Republic of Ireland floats triumphantly over every part of the territory of the ancient Irish nation, the cradleland of our race."