

GAMES OF THE GAEL

Limerick Gaeldom And Fight For Freedom (By "CAMAN")

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THE reference by the retiring Chairman - Very Rev. E. Canon Punch, P.P. at the recent County Convention to olden days in Limerick Gaeldom and the long, hard fight for the establishment of the native games in their present strong position, recalls the part played by the Gaels in the struggle for Irish freedom, part and parcel of the modern story of an epic period, which many still regard as the real glory days of the Gaelic renaissance.

We have it on no less an authority than that great Gael and patriot, the late Michael Collins, that the G.A.A. played a very big part in helping to smash the power of the British garrisons throughout Ireland.

Collins enrolled G.A.A. officials to his army of freedom. They, in turn, recruited virtually every able-bodied member or supporter of the G.A.A. into Volunteer activities.

From the national games the Volunteers turned to the national struggle for independence. Their Irish-Ireland ideals inspired them in battle as in play, where they shouldered rifle instead of caman, wore bandolier instead of jersey.

A Soldier And A Gael. No man did more for Gaelic pastimes in Limerick than the late Comdt. Sean McSwaney, and because his career was typical of many at the time it will serve as an illustration of how Gaelic and Volunteer activities were entwined.

Better known to his friends in Limerick as Johnny Swaney, his big aim was to see the country he loved and served so faithfully thoroughly Irish, and it was due to his untiring efforts that the far-famed Young Ireland Hurling Club was kept in the front rank of Gaelic sports throughout the country.

Particularly interested in the youth, he was keenly alive to the value of an early training in Gaelic ideals, and was before his time in a desire to see the national games played in the primary schools.

For the Fianna boys he had a particular regard. On them he looked as the hope of the future, and to the end he maintained a live interest in the lads he was wont to term "the best boys in Ireland."

Days of Hurling Glory. No man did more for our national games than "Johnny" but he always shunned the limelight and often let others take the honour and glory, content that the work was carried out and little caring who got the credit.

dan, Chairman; Willie Naughton, Vice-Chairman; Charlie Holland, Secretary, and Ned Halvey, his assistant.

"Johnny" was also a popular referee and "handed" many important contests between the leading teams, including the 1913 county senior hurling final, in which Fedamore beat the holders, Ballinacorney, 4-4 to 2-2.

In an article like this I can only deal with the highlights of his career on the hurling field. One of the greatest of county finals was that played in the Markets Field on March 19th, 1911, for the 1910 title. A grand Young Ireland team beat Castleconnell, the holders, 4-2 to 4-1 after a succession of thrills rarely experienced since.

Other epic games of that Young Ireland glory spell included a grand victory over the Dublin Faughs at Jones's Road (now Croke Park), Dublin, in the Gaelic League Oireachtas final on July 30th, 1911, and the defeat of Ballygarry in the John Daly Cup final at the Markets Field on February 11th, 1912, with the donor and veteran Penlan throwing in the ball.

The 1911 Fight And After. When the Irish Volunteers were mobilised for action during Easter Week, 1916, Johnny was very ill and under doctor's orders to go to hospital for a serious operation.

His sickness, however, did not prevent him working feverishly to ensure that every man in his section would be in his place when the long awaited fight began. And "Johnny" was there on that fateful day with never a word of complaint save the fact that he was in agony all the time.

His cheerful disposition, even under difficulties was a thing to marvel at, and when England closed her prison doors on "Johnny" and many of his Gaelic comrades, they too failed to repress his grand spirit and he was planning and plotting despite the gloom and apparent hopelessness of the national position at the time.

The men and women who fought against fearful odds and died the death of martyrs in that glorious Easter Week were denounced and defamed by the agents of England. Then, like a bombshell burst in the midst of the bandera codes, the voice of Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick, disputing the right of England's butchers to interfere in Irish affairs, and proclaiming to the world that the men who died in Easter Week were "Ireland's latest martyrs."

British Ban on Games. The playing of Gaelic games was prohibited following the Rising, but the ban was raised on June 10th. The British later cancelled all special trials for Gaelic matches and on November 10th, 1918, an incident occurred at the county senior hurling game between Claugraun and Bruff, played at Pallasgreen, that attracted national-wide attention. The Co. G.A.A. Secretary, Mr. Jim Ryan, refused to admit members of the R.I.C. to the game and was prosecuted for his action.

ent that the ban was a complete failure.

General Strike In Limerick. Another trial of strength with the British took place in Limerick in mid-April, 1919, when a fortnight's general strike took place in protest against the brutality of the invader. The All-Ireland G.A.A. Congress voted £100 to the Strike Fund. Limerick Hurlers Play at Riverstown.

On August 8th, 1920, the Limerick v. Tipperary Munster Senior Hurling Championship semi-final arranged for the Cork Athletic Grounds had to be transferred to Riverstown, owing to the military ban on public meetings and assemblies in Cork City.

The Limerick team and officials travelled by road, because of the rail stoppage, due to the railway employees refusal to carry members of the British Forces. Most Rev. Dr. Mannix, the patriot Bishop of Melbourne, was expected to arrive at Cobh the following day, but never reached there as he was arrested on the high seas by British Government agents. His colours were worn by the Limerick team, but were torn off by the military at Charleville.

In Patrick Street, Cork, the Limerick charabanc skidded and struck one of the supporting pillars of the porch outside the Victoria Hotel, and a loud crash of the ironwork announced that the boys from Garryowen had arrived. There was a large crowd at the match, which Limerick won, 5-7 to 3-3.

Police and military rowdiness, which was evident in Limerick for a long time, reached its zenith on August 15th, 1920, when several houses were fired and the occupants brutally assaulted. Following this, curfew was enforced and the matches arranged for August 22nd, at the Markets Field, had to be transferred to Caherconlish.

Munster Hurling Final Postponed. The Munster senior hurling final, fixed for Thurles on August 29th, was postponed owing to the precarious condition of Cork's Lord Mayor, Ald. Terence MacSwiney, who was on hunger strike in Brixton Prison. As a token of sympathy no G.A.A. games were played in Munster during the period of the fast, which ended with the death of the heroic patriot on October 26th after seventy-three days protest. Sunday, October 31st, was declared a closed date over Ireland as a mark of respect to his memory and as a protest the inhuman treatment of him by the British Government.

Limerick being under Martial Law for the remainder of the year and until the Truce on July 11th, 1921, G.A.A. events were at a standstill during that time. The murder, by British Crown Forces, in his home, of the Mayor of Limerick, Seoirse Clancy, on the night of March 7th, 1921, removed another great Gael from our midst.

Johnny Swaney worked to the end for the cause he loved and that he was not forgotten by his Gaelic friends was proved when they organised a big tournament as a testimonial, when playing field activities were resumed in 1923. When the Black and Tan terror was over, and a Treaty had been made, Ireland was to know dark days—the darkest, most disastrous in its history. The G.A.A. did more to minimise bitterness after the Civil War than any other organisation in Ireland.

Better Gaelic Teams If There Were No Ban

FOR one cannot see any point in banning games that are good for the youth of the country, whether they originated in England or Czechoslovakia or anywhere else." So said Rev. M. Kelly, C.C., Newcastle West, when returning thanks for his unanimous re-election as President of the local G.A.A. Club on Sunday last. Father Kelly went on to say they would have far better teams if they could do away with the ban, as they would then have far more players to select from and they would have a better spirit of unity amongst all sections of the community.

RETURNING thanks for his unanimous re-election, Father Kelly also thanked the people of the town and parish for their continued support for the games. He warmly complimented the officials and committee on their good work and the players of the various teams on their fine sportsmanship during the past year. He also paid tribute to a number of players who had left during the year, including Ned Vaughan, who had emigrated to the U.S.A., and Richard O'Dwyer, who had joined Christ's army in the Dominican Order. The members of the Club, he said, had done their work very well and he was sure they would continue to keep the flag of Gaelic games flying in the parish during the coming year.

CAN SEE NO POINT IN "BAN." "We have the usual difficulty in a town like this," continued Father Kelly, "where we have a number of rival clubs playing foreign games, as they are called. In modern times, since we got the measure of freedom we now enjoy under the Republic, I for one cannot see any point in banning games that are good for the youth of the country, whether they originated in England or Czechoslovakia or anywhere else. Personally I feel, of course, that when the rule is there we have to accept it, if we are to continue as members of the G.A.A. We will have to abide by the rules accepted by the majority of the Association. At the same time I consider we should be entitled in a free country to air our views. We do not believe in this ban on foreign games. We prefer the games of the Gael. They are the games we played ourselves, but we do not see anything wrong from the point of view of nationality, morals or otherwise, in youth playing other games. It is much better to see them playing games, anyway, than not playing at all."

"HYPOCRISY" "On a former occasion," continued Father Kelly, "I was found fault with when I said this rule was only hypocrisy as part of the rules of the G.A.A. I still maintain that because, if it is from the national and patriotic point of view it is being maintained, then why don't they maintain another rule in the G.A.A. which forbids foreign dances? To my mind foreign dances have caused far more deterioration in the youth of this country than foreign games. Why should they enforce the rule against foreign games when they allow foreign dances, even though the rule against foreign dances is still in the book of the G.A.A.? However, I suppose we can do nothing about it. We have had our say and we have tried to get them to see reason and light but they have not seen it."

"Play your games," Father Kelly told the club delegates, "but if you are members of the G.A.A., then CANTRELL & COCHRANE, remember, if you want to remain (adv.)"

members, you will have to stick to the rules. You have no choice in that matter. So far as we here in Newcastle West are concerned, we will do our very best to continue to keep the flag of the G.A.A. flying in the parish, as we have always done in the past.

FAR BETTER TEAMS IN ABSENCE OF BAN

"We feel that we would have far better teams if we could do away with the ban, but we cannot do that as we have not the power. If we could, we would have far more players to select from and we would have a better spirit of unity amongst all sections of the community. However, we must accept the rule as it is there. As I said before, we will continue to do our best for Gaelic games in the town and to keep the name of Newcastle West not only in the western but in the county championships as well" (applause).

LOSS OF PLAYERS THROUGH EMIGRATION

Mr. John Whelan, Hon. Secretary, who was unanimously re-elected, referred to the loss of players through emigration and said he understood that some more of their young members were contemplating leaving the country. In that connection, he thought a special appeal should be made by the Club to employers in the town to give consideration when filling vacancies to the boys and young men who had helped to put the name of the town on the G.A.A. map. With so much emigration it was becoming very difficult to run a club and, apart from the Club at all, it was very hard to see young fellows, willing workers and good Catholic boys, leaving the country. A special appeal should be made to employers to try to remember these young lads when work became available. He could assure all concerned that, as far as their players were concerned, they could be given the highest references by the President and officials of the Club.

APPEAL TO EMPLOYERS

It was too bad, Mr. Whelan added, that so many of their youth in the town should be emigrating. They were the type of lads who could not be expected to keep walking around the streets if there was no work for them. Furthermore, they could not be expected to give of their best on the playing field if they had no employment. For that reason he made a special appeal to employers in the town to give these lads as much employment as possible. They could be given the highest recommendation by the Club officials and particularly by their Rev. President.

All over the country the demand is for CLUB ORANGE—and re-elected member Club Orange is made ONLY by club delegates, but if you are members of the G.A.A., then CANTRELL & COCHRANE, remember, if you want to remain (adv.)"

