

GREAT LIMERICK ATHLETES.

No. 125—E. J. TREACY of Oola

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HAMMER throwing is, without a shadow of doubt, the most truly Irish event on the athletic calendar.

The cult and tradition of hammer throwing goes deep into Irish antiquity, and is still essentially the same in principle, if somewhat different in practice, as the ancient "Roth Cleas" of the days of Conor and his Red Branch Knights.

It could be claimed for Cuchulain that he was in his time Ireland's champion hammer thrower, and we know that in the Ireland of his day it was demanded of every youth that he should become expert in the hammer event, which, as an athletic achievement, ranked next to hurling in the lives of the ancient Irish. Hurling and hammer were the national symbols of Gaelic athleticism three thousand years ago. What the discus was to Greece, those were to Ireland.

The part that Limerick County and its immediate neighbourhood have played in the evolution of the hammer in modern times can be judged by a glance at the world's record figures—shared by four men in seventy years. J. S. Mitchell, of Emly, laid the foundation of Irish supremacy with a throw of 130 feet in 1888, the occasion of the big G.A.A. "invasion" of America.

WORLD RECORD THROW.

Four years later, the Emly man brought the figure to 140 ft. 11 in. In 1896 J. J. Flanagan of Kilmallock district, came into the picture with a throw of 147 feet, and followed with record on top of record until he put the figure at 184 ft. 4 in. Mat McGrath of Nenagh, later improved it to 187 ft. 4 in. in 1911, and then along came Paddy Ryan of Pallasgreen, in 1913, to put the figure at 189 ft. 6½ in., which has often been challenged, and closely, too, by Dr. Pat O'Callaghan of Dunhallow, in particular, but still remains the world's best.

The most depressing failure about Irish athletics at the moment is the almost complete eclipse of this famous old event, at which Irishmen were so long supreme.

In "Knocknagow" we read of the deeds of the famed Matt the Thresher—typical of Irish life of his time and it is indeed a sad reflection on our present day that an event which holds such ties with the older Ireland of even pre-Christian times should be allowed fall into oblivion.

MOST DIFFICULT EVENT.

The hammer is, admittedly, the most difficult of all the weight events to master and evidence enough of this can be found in the long years it took some of the great champions to reach their peak. Flanagan was at it for twenty years before he set his best figures, and Ryan took nearly as long to get to the top.

The subject of our sketch this week—E. J. Treacy of Oola, accompanied Paddy Ryan part of the way, and but for the departure of the Pallasgreen giant to try his luck and seek fame and fortune in America, in 1911, the Oola man might have made even a deeper impress on the Irish athletic stage. Stimulating opposition is worth a lot in athletics, and is usually the main factor in bringing the best out of a man.

E. J. Treacy was born at Kealogue, Oola, about the year 1888, but went to live shortly afterwards at the Cross of Cluggin, where he trained for athletics on the Hill field behind the house at present owned by Mr. Con Ryan, who, by the way, is a first cousin of the late Dr. John Ryan, who pioneered Gaelic games and athletics in U.C.D., and captained the Collegians team that won All-Ireland hurling honours for Dublin, in 1916. Dr. John was one of the really great workers in athletics during the Tailteann games short-lived revival.

POWERFUL FIGURE.

Edmond John, as he was always called, grew up a powerful figure of a man, over six feet in height and built in proportion. Refined and easy going, he struck up a grand friendship with Paddy Ryan, and it was with him he generally went to all the sports meetings, many of them faraway ones.

It was probably his association with the big Pallasgreen man that got him really interested in the hammer and under the guidance of the future world's record holder, Edmond John improved his technique almost out of all recognition.

1907 was one of the most active and crowded years in the history of Limerick athletics, and it was in July of that year he recorded his first win with the hammer, the figure being a modest 115 feet, and the venue Cappawhite.

Twelve months later, on July 29th, 1908, at Blarney, he again won, this time improving his distance to 125 ft. 10 ins.

PUPIL BEATS MASTER.

The pupil beat the master at Tipperary sports on August 8th following. He had a handicap of 25 feet from Paddy Ryan, who was Irish champion of long standing at the time, and with a great heave

of 132ft. 9ins. he brought his total to 157 ft. 9 ins., to which the Pallasgreen man's response was 152 ft. 7 ins., figures that actually exceeded any of those he had to put up to win the title in the years of his mastery—1902, 1905, 1907 or 1908.

MEMORABLE DAY.

That memorable day at Tipperary, E. J. Treacy also won the hurling puck—then a popular competition at most athletic gatherings—thus revealing the olden mastery with hurling and hammer, mentioned earlier in this article.

The Oola man was back again at Tipperary on June 13th, 1909, and won a Munster title with the 16 lbs. hammer, his effort this occasion being 132 feet—T. Ludgate of Mallow filling second place.

Ludgate turned the tables in the 56 lbs. between legs, in which we find Treacy appearing for the first time in championship competition, the figures reading: Ludgate, 28 ft. 2 ins., first; Treacy, 24 ft. 3 ins., second.

Other Limerick successes on that occasion will be read with interest: Half mile flat—M. Hourigan, Ballingarry, first; 100 yards flat—Percy Kirwan, Waterford, first; P. O'Connell, Limerick, second. High jump—Tim Leahy, Cregane, 5 ft. 11 ins., first; J. J. Bourke, Dromcollogher, 5 ft 9½ ins., second. Hop, step and jump—J. J. Daly, Tipperary, 46 ft. 7 ins., first; P. Kirwan, Waterford, 45 ft. 9 ins., second; M. J. Creede, Elton, 44 ft. 6 ins., third. 120 yards hurdles—J. J. Bourke, Dromcollogher, first. Tim Leahy, Cregane, second. One mile flat—M. Hourigan, Ballingarry, first; Tim Crough, Tipperary, second.

A fortnight later, Hourigan and Crough again met, this time at Listowel in the five mile flat championship of Ireland, the Ballingarry man once more taking the honours.

IRISH CHAMPIONSHIPS AT MALLOW.

On July 18th, 1909, the Irish championships were decided at Mallow, Paddy Ryan winning his fifth and last national crown in the hammer with his best championship performance on native soil—154 ft. 5 ins., E. J. Treacy filling second place at 137 feet.

The Pallasgreen man won two other Irish titles that evening—the 28 lbs. at 34 ft. 1½ ins., with another great Limerick man, Mick Heelan, of Caherelly, second; and the 56 lbs (unlimited run and follow) at 35 ft 2 ins.

Other Limerick successes that day included a "double" by T. J. Kelly, who won the 220 yards (23 seconds) and 440 yards (50 4/5 seconds) and ran second to Percy Kirwan in the 100 yards flat. Tim Leahy and J. J. Bourke tied at 6 ft. 1 in. for first place in the high jump; J. J. Bresnihan was second at 24 ft 0½ in. to T. Ludgate in the 56 lbs. without follow and Maurice Hourigan was second to M. O'Callaghan, of Banteer, in the four miles flat.

SPLENDID THROW.

At Tipperary, on September 26th, Treacy had a second in the 56 lbs. (unlimited run and follow) with the splendid throw of 37 feet, which exceeded every championship performance bar that of Tom Kiely who recorded 38 ft. 11 ins., in 1898. In passing, it might be mentioned that 1909 was the last occasion a championship was decided in this event—another typical Irish item that has been let into discard.

At Kilkenny, on June 14th, 1910, "E. J." won the hammer at 137 ft. 5 ins. Then at what appears to have been his favourite venue, Tipperary Town, he won the supreme prize of his career, the All-Ireland title in the 16 lbs. hammer, taking over from his dear friend and neighbour, Paddy Ryan, with his best ever throw in competition—145 ft. 9 ins.

The great Pallasgreen man soon after left his native shores, and it was not long until Edmond John Treacy deserted the athletic fields on which he had displayed such promise.

He soon turned to other pastures, became a successful breeder of bloodstock, and won several races at the old famous Barronstown and elsewhere. The most notable of his horses was Double Dew.

The advent of World War 1, and the stoppage of racing for a prolonged period, had a serious effect on the valuable bloodstock industry he had built up so carefully, and although he had many contacts and was very popular with all the great figures of the turf at the time, the long years of war ruined any hope of a revival and "E. J." went to America, where he remained for some time. But the call of his native land proved as insistent as it did for his great friend of athletic days, and Edmond John Treacy, like Paddy Ryan, returned to Ireland, where he is still, I am glad to say, hale and hearty. Though out of his native county for several years, his deeds are still recalled by many a Limerick fireside, bringing back, as they do, such happy memories of "days that used to be."