

No. 170—SEAN CARROLL of Castleconnell

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

DEATH has taken another of the great G.A.A. figures who played a noble part in the fight for Irish freedom.

Sean Carroll was a fighter all through a long and active life. The first twenty years of manhood were devoted to the G.A.A., and he gave everything he had to promoting and playing the games of the Gael.

Like many of his colleagues on the hurling and football fields, Sean threw himself heart and soul into the propagation of the national language, and the Gaelic League never boasted a more enthusiastic member.

As the fight against the British grew in intensity Sean's hurling days were just concluding and in company with many well-known players, he was soon to be found in the ranks of the National forces.

MANY FINE QUALITIES.

In every aspect of the fight he was foremost and his fine qualities of head and heart soon won for him a proud place as Officer Commanding the Flying Column, which proved one of the most active and successful units in the entire country.

His personal courage was unchallenged all through the bitter struggle, and he inspired the others of his company with the same unshaken purpose and determination. He was a stern disciplinarian, and when he gave an order he saw that it was obeyed. But his men loved him with an intense love—they had the opportunities of studying his many fine qualities under the most difficult of circumstances—and were satisfied that no finer soldier ever fought for a cause in which he believed with all the fervour of a disciple.

"A GREAT MAN."

A great man in every meaning of the term, he retained the personal love of his admirers all through the heartrending dissensions of Civil War, and it is on record that men who were sent to capture him just went the other way—they could not bring themselves to endanger one with a record of service of which any man could be proud.

Like many idealists, Sean Carroll lived to see the realisation of much he had fought for—and he can hardly be blamed if he was a trifle disappointed. The Ireland of his dreams—a Gaelic speaking, nationally minded country, scorning all anglicising influences, seems as far away as ever, despite the sacrifices and the efforts of the makers of history—amongst whom Sean Carroll must be numbered.

A great patriot in every meaning of the term, he had no place for compromise or excuse. His way was the all out one, and he gave all, and expected others to do likewise, when the cause of Ireland was at issue.

THE COMMON OBJECTIVE.

When the British were here, the common objective of getting them

out united our people as never before. National spirit was uppermost and the Gaelic Ireland looked just around the corner.

Division and disillusionment followed the Treaty, and the Gaelic spirit evaporated. Sean never understood a surrender to expediency, and never adjusted himself to the changed conditions. Many might have labelled him as intolerant but that is a harsh interpretation. He was Irish and Gaelic to the core, and just did not understand why others once devoted to the cause should have strayed from the straight and narrow path, along which he continued to the end.

Sean was a hurling devotee from his early youth. The traditions of the game were strong in Castleconnell and he soon demonstrated his attachment to the ancient native code. He grew up with a generation that made hurling history by the Shannon, and the name of Sean Carroll is one of the first to be recalled when old timers speak of those days.

MEMBER OF SALLYMOUNT TEAM.

In official records we find reference to him as a member of the Sallymount team that beat Riversmount (Ferrybridge) in a senior hurling championship game played at the Markets Field on May 1st, 1901. The score on that occasion was 2-9 to 2-5, and the score-keeper was Jack Murphy. The players are worth recalling:

Sallymount—D. Delane, J. Herbert, Joseph Herbert, M. Kett, J. "Tyler" Mackey, L. Lee, W. Galligan, D. Galligan, Sean Carroll, J. McMahon, J. Bourke, W. Daly, M. Daly, J. Mack, M. O'Rourke, J. Kearney, M. McCarthy.

Riversmount—D. O'Brien, P. Bourke, B. O'Rourke, M. Byrnes, E. Naughton, T. Byrnes, P. Guerin, J. Clohessy, E. Clohessy, T. O'Rourke, M. O'Rourke, J. Foley, T. O'Brien, J. Foley, J. Murray, T. Naughton, M. Kennelly.

In the months that followed, the Sallymount lads had a very active time. They were beaten by the Newport Kickhams, at Newport, and by Shamrocks, at the Markets Field, but beat Kildimo, at Ferrybridge, in the local tournament.

IN COUNTY SENIOR HURLING GAMES.

In the County Senior Hurling final they opposed Rathkeale, at the Markets Field on December 8th, and lost 2-4 to 2-3, in a hotly disputed game, which the County Board subsequently ordered to be re-played, and the Sallymount boys won the re-play easily.

Sean Carroll donned the Limerick County jersey on Oct. 13th, 1901, at Tralee, for a game with Kerry, which the Shannonsiders won, and he wore it with distinction for many a day.

He had as team mates on that first outing:—J. Reidy, J. Cattrell,

P. Keating (Ballingarry), W. Sheehan, P. Flaherty, J. Kennedy (Rathkeale), P. O'Dea, A. Kelly, W. Brennan (Shamrocks), J. Mackey, D. Dillane, D. Galligan, T. Griffin (Sallymount), M. O'Shaughnessy (Mungret), D. Buckley (Templeglantine), J. Flood, J. Ryan (Caherline), M. Bourke (Ferrybridge), J. Quillinan (Elton).

In encounters with teams from other counties the Sallymount boys upheld the prestige of Limerick hurling, beating the Dublin Raparees, 6-13 to 1-3, and Cork Sarsfields 3-13 to 2-10.

The Sallymount team won a new set of jerseys when they beat Kilmenny, 3-8 to 2-3, at the Markets field in a game in aid of the City Junior Board.

The wealth of hurling talent in Limerick about this period is demonstrated in the fact that when Sean lined out for his second appearance in county colours he had as colleagues very few of the players of his first outing.

THE TEAM AGAINST CLARE.

The team against Clare was:—Sean Carroll, captain, J. Mackey, J. Herbert (Castleconnell), M. Creed (Elton), A. Hartigan (Kilmenny), T. Flynn, goal; M. Brazil (Ardpatrick), R. Quinlan (Bruff), M. Feely (Croom), M. Clifford, E. Gibbons (Ballyagran), M. Kiely (Caherline), John O'Rourke (Kildimo), P. Flaherty (Rathkeale), J. O'Connell, J. O'Brien, J. Creamer (Young Ireland).

Through the thrill packed years Sean Carroll continued right along to 1917 an ornament to Limerick hurling, whether in Castleconnell or in county colours. He gave all that was in him and got a response from the crowd that few could evoke.

When I asked an old veteran recently, what he thought of Sean as a hurler, he answered simply: "He was like the butt of a tree." That was a compliment to his amazing strength and ability to take hard knocks—typical of the man who never drew back, either as a hurler or a soldier.

USED HIS HEAD AND HIS HANDS.

His usual place on the team was in the attack and he often figured with distinction in the full forward berth. It is said of him that he used head and hands in unison, and a noted characteristic of his play was that he never aimed for the centre of the net. He always tried an angle drive, and was able to deceive the best goal-keeper.

His last appearance in togs was against Young Ireland in 1917 in a match that proved a right rousing struggle. That ended his hurling days in a blaze of glory and left a fragrant memory that death cannot efface. Solus De leis.