

CROOM has given us some grand hurlers, and looking back the arches of the years we meet famous figures that made the welkin ring in days that are gone for ever. Club games reached a high plane in those far-off days, and enthusiasm often reached battle heat when the great ones of the arena clashed in championship or tournament conflict. Somehow the "honour of the parish" evoked greater response then, and older Gaels retain memories, ever golden ones, of the men and teams that built the Gaelic tradition strong in days when it certainly was not "fashionable" to belong to the Gaelic Athletic Association.

Those were halcyon days for the G.A.A.—the big crowds and the mighty stadiums of the present day notwithstanding—days the memory of which for old Gaels has never been effaced nor lost its power to thrill, though, alas, that memory is saddened by the ever widening gaps which the relentless reaper—Death—makes amongst "the friends of boyhood's years."

LONG AND BRILLIANT CAREER.

The mention of Mick Feely's name is sufficient to awake many memories in the hearts of old Limerick Gaels, and those not so old, who saw him play during a long and brilliant career that spanned more than a quarter of a century on the playing fields of Ireland—a remarkable record of a remarkable man.

It takes a lifetime of experience to live, to know how to be a human being, to learn all there is to know about hurling, to understand men, to understand yourself. No intelligent person would honestly accept the bribe of eternal youth in exchange for the deep satisfaction which emerges from the crucible of the years. So it is with our old hurlers, and although they miss the sweet music of the ash in close clashes on the field, they bring to the game a judgment mature in age and in experience that helps to build tradition in the old strongholds of the game.

LEARNED HIS HURLING AT AN EARLY AGE.

Mick Feely learned how to wield the ash at an early age, and the closing years of the last century—a real golden era by the Shannon—saw him figure in many great club encounters with the Croom lads. And in later years, with his companions from Croom, Mick guarded Limerick's name and fame well in several brilliant encounters. For nearly three decades he was one of Limerick's leading hurlers and participated in many stirring struggles, including memorable club tussles with the other leading teams of that time—Castleconnell, Young Ireland, Caherline, Claughaun, Kilfinane, Ballingarry, Cappamore and South Liberties.

One of the best "forty yards" men of his day, he was called to county colours in 1901 and quickly won fame. A demon for work when play waxed hottest, it was often hard to decide in what position Mick was playing, for he hunted all over the field after the leather—clearing hot assaults from his own goalmouth one minute, leading the attack at the other end the next.

TOOK ALL THE FREES.

A great man on a placed ball, Mick took all the frees for his team—club or county—and rarely sent one astray. As a matter of fact, so great was his reputation in this regard that I remember an old Cork hurling lover once saying: "Sure that fellow could make a goal or a point with his eyes shut." And only recently I heard that grand old Claughaun hurling enthusiast, Joe Gleeson, recall a great Munster match in Cork, in which Limerick were a point down entering lost time. The Shannonsiders, fighting desperately, were awarded a brace of frees in closing minute. Mick Feely won that

game off his own hurley, for, as Joe aptly put it, "he would have scored those points through the eye of a needle."

And, as if to illustrate the great scoring figures Limerick boasted in those days old timers will tell of an occasion at the Markets Field when the Shannonsiders played a team of hurlers from America, Limerick, skippered by Mick Feely, winning after a great game.

THE WINNING OF A BET.

From six frees Mick had run up a total of a goal and five points, and when the home side were awarded a "seventy the Captain turned to Con Scanlan, who was standing beside him and said: "Come on Con, have a try at this one." The Fedamore star agreed, but as he struck the ball he was charged and the whistle had gone before his effort sailed between the uprights for a point. He took a second attempt, and the exact same thing happened—two perfect points, and both disallowed. As Con set himself for the third try somebody in the stand said "He'll never do it again." The late Michael O'Shaughnessy, of Bruff, immediately offered a "five"—a princely sum then, that he would, and it was duly "covered." And sure enough Con obliged, except that it was a goal he scored this time. The great Bruff sportsman won his bet and sent his "winnings" to treat the hurlers after the game.

HERO OF A SENSATIONAL VICTORY.

Mick Feely assisted Limerick in numerous contests for the Southern crown, and was one of the heroes of a grand Shannonside fifteen that had a sensational victory over a fancied Cork side, at Tralee, for the 1910 Munster Championship. The Garryowen representatives subsequently met Wexford at Jones's Road, in the All-Ireland decider—it was an ill starred game for the Munster men, who met with an unlucky reverse.

The Limerick players were again Southern title-holders in 1911 and were once more unfortunate in their quest for the Blue Riband. The story of an unplayable pitch at Cork and the subsequent Limerick refusal to the refixture at Thurles is part and parcel of the tragic story of Championship titles "thrown away" by the Shannon.

One of the toughest and most terrible tussles ever waged for the Munster crown took place at Waterford on Sunday, September 1st, 1912, between Cork and Limerick. Interest in the issue was widespread and the Suirside City saw an immense hosting of Gaels.

STUBBORNLY FOUGHT.

The match was stubbornly fought from start to stop with a slight advantage in favour of Limerick. They were level at the interval, 1-2 apiece. Leading by a point coming on to time, Limerick fought like demons. Then Mick Byrne, of Cork Sarsfields pulled at a wing ball up to Dan Kennefick, of St. Mary's. The latter crossed to Kennedy of Carrigwohill, and the Limerick citadel fell. Immediately pandemonium broke loose—men seemed to have taken leave of their senses, hats, coats and umbrellas were thrown into the air. Cork went mad for joy—the impossible had been accomplished.

The Cork team that evening included grand stalwarts like Jim Kelleher, of Dungourney, whom Mick once told me was the best hurler he met in his hurling career. The Croom man played against him about forty times, and they became great friends; Connie Sheehan; stonewall net-minder Andy Fitzgerald, who once said that "Mick Feely had a magnet on his hurley"; "Bowler" Walsh; Barry Murphy; "Mike" Dorney and Jerry Beckett; Limerick had "Tyler" Mackey, Paddy Vaughan, Mick Feely, Tom Hayes, Sean Carroll, "Egan" Clancy, Ned Treacy, Ter Mangan,

Con Scanlan and Paddy Flaherty. Wonderful hurling company, surely!

THE CARDINAL'S MEDALS.

Following the controversy regarding the abortive All-Ireland final of 1911, the meeting of Nore and Shannon in the final for the gold medals presented by His Eminence, Cardinal Agliardi, in aid of the Father Matthew Hall, Cork, played in Dublin on July 27th, 1913, aroused remarkable interest. It proved a fine robust game, exciting in the extreme, and Limerick won 5-2 to 4-1. Mick Feely captained the team, which was selected by Croom Club, as County champions. Kilkenny were at the height of their glory, with a team that won seven All-Ireland titles between 1904 and 1913, with famed hurling figures like "Drug" Walsh, Dan Kennedy, Jack Rochford, Sim Walton, Matt Gargin, the Graces and Doyley—names that will never be forgotten by Norseside.

On a great Limerick team that included many noted figures, Mick Feely was the great favourite of the crowds, and it was notable that when inviting Limerick or Croom many Tournament Committees, when inviting Limerick or Croom to play always insisted that Mick should be included in the side. The result was that he was in action almost every Sunday, for he often travelled, too, with city selections picked by Young Ireland or Claughaun—running many a time, from Croom to either Patrickswell or Adare railway station in order to catch a train for venues where these teams were engaged.

A GRAND, CLEAN PLAYER.

Mick was a grand, clean player, and the great Tom Semple, of Thurles, once remarked that he was the best man that ever stood in Ireland. On another occasion Jack Rochford of Kilkenny was heard to say: "If Feely is not watched we'll be beat to-day." And then "Carberry," who gave Mick his nickname "The burly tailor from Croom" wrote once that he considered the Croom man the "classiest and most stylish hurler of his day."

Space does not permit reference to the many thrilling games in which Mick figured with the Croom Club; suffice it to say that he played with them in every game of importance from the closing years of the last century right up to March 15th, 1925, when he won his third County Championship medal—the previous ones being secured in 1908 and 1919. He also won Murphy Cup and Tournament trophies galore.

It is no exaggeration to say that Mick was a positive menace to even the stoutest of defences. It has been said of him that he "had the finest pair of hands ever to use a caman." It was no idle boast. Mick Feely was probably the greatest marksman Limerick ever produced. His coolness, good judgment and accuracy often "won the day" for Limerick. He specialised in the taking of "frees," and a breach of the rules by a member of the opposing team generally led to a score off Mick's hurley. Old timers still recall with pride his great displays on many a hard-fought field.

READY WIT AND GOOD HUMOUR.

Mick's ready wit and good humour'd sporting spirit made him a popular favourite with his team mates. The spirit of camaraderie that animated the Limerick team during the years he was associated with it has been in large measure attributed to Mick. He was never unduly elated by victory, or depressed by defeat.

His retirement from the hurling field left a great gap. Beloved off the Gaelic arena, if you ask a hundred old-time Limerick Gaels who was their county's leading light, they all will have one answer—many will tell you he was the greatest hurler of his day.

No. 92—Mick O'Brien of Drom-cologher.