

## No. 177—JOHN J. KEANE of Anglesboro'

**M**ANY times I heard J. J. Keane say that hard work never killed any man, and he proved it in his own remarkable career.

When the Anglesboro' man died recently at the fine old age of eighty-six, he left behind him a record of achievement in business and sport sufficient to justify half a dozen lifetimes. How he managed to crowd all he did into even the lengthy span God gave him is tribute indeed to the magnificence of the man.

P. D. Mehigan, writing in the 'Gaelic Weekly' a short time ago on "Gaelic Lights I've Known," had this to say of the South Limerick Gael who became an internationally known figure in the realms of athletics:

"Born at the foot of the Galtees in 1870, John J. Keane, of Anglesboro', was a true son of those fertile slopes where Limerick, Cork and Tipperary converge, on the western entrance to the Glen of Aherlow. He was as stern and unbending as Galtee-more itself. Yet he was as generous and warm hearted as the plains of the Golden Vale.

#### IN ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL FINAL.

"I knew him as a dashing, fearless footballer with the Dublin Geraldines, when as a youth I watched him play in the 1899 All-Ireland Final against Nil Desperandum of Cork at Croke Park (then known as Jones's Road), on February 10th, 1901. He had already played on the Geraldines' seventeen that won the All-Ireland Final of 1898 from Erin's Hopes of Waterford—played in boisterous rain on April 8th, 1900, at Tipperary Town, when Geraldines were easy winners on the score 2-8 to 0-4.

"Against Nils of Cork, Geraldines had a stiffer game, but they won well (1-10 to 6 points). J. J. Keane tore through the field that day like a whirlwind. He didn't seem to possess great football skill, but his speed and power were tremendous—a fearless, tearaway footballer who seemed to brush all opposition aside.

"Soon I learnt who he was and what he was. A farmer's son, he had worked hard on the land

### By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

after school in his youth, studied on diligently and showed great business acumen, when, after examination and interview, he won a junior clerical post in a big corn and hay store at Smithfield Market, Dublin.

#### WORKED HARD AND TRAINED HARD.

"Young Keane worked hard and trained hard. His outdoor youthful life at the Galtee Mountain foot served him well and built up a powerful frame. He loved coursing, too, and always kept a few useful greyhounds. He built a big rural connection; his blunt honesty and sound judgment won him hundreds of friends. Rapidly he ran into a high administrative post with his firm. He led a most abstemious life and trained regularly."

On top of his football successes, as described by P. D. Mehigan, "J.J." won the 120 yards All Ireland Championship over the hurdles in 1900, at the G.A.A. Athletic Championship. This was a top-class achievement because it was secured at a period when two outstanding hurdlers were at their best—Pat Harding, a nephew of the celebrated Davin brothers, and the great all-rounder T. F. Kiely. Between them, this pair held the G.A.A. Hurdling Championship from 1896 to 1903 and Keane was the only man who broke the run of their successes.

#### LIVED IN GREAT ERA FOR IRISH ATHLETICS.

The Anglesboro' lad knew little of modern style or specialised training, but he lived in a great era for Irish athletics and held his own with grand figures like the Leahys, the Kielys, Peter O'Connor and Pat Harding, fit company for any world event in their day.

Though long a great man in the Geraldines Club, an uncompromising footballer and a fine organiser, athletes were his big love. When it became apparent that hurling and football were threatening to weaken the G.A.A.'s interest in athletics, he gave his time and energy to ensuring that the athletic competitions would retain their rightful place in the Association's activities.

Mainly through his exertions an Athletic Council was formed within the G.A.A. framework, and he held the position of Chairman of this through some difficult years. When the I.A.A.A. went out in open opposition, "J.J." manfully stuck by the G.A.A. standard and his work and influence did much to maintain the G.A.A. mastery during a sorry period.

#### THE SWORN ENEMY OF CROOKED PRACTICES.

Inside the Association he did much to raise its prestige and

power. Rigidly straight and upright in all his dealings, he was the sworn enemy of the author of any crooked practice. At a period when Irish athletics were in danger of falling into disrepute in many places he did yeoman work in cutting out abuses, and was mainly instrumental in putting a stop to betting at G.A.A. meetings.

He grieved at the decline that set in during the years of the first World War and did everything he could to stop the rot and restore the brilliancy of his young years. In furtherance of that object he resolved to end the split and restore unity between all amateur athletes. He worked unceasingly until he eventually succeeded in uniting the G.A.A. and I.A.A.A. athletes into one body, which became the N.A. and C.A., and of which J. J. Keane was elected first President—a fitting choice, for no man worked harder than he for that much desired outcome of athletic unity.

#### A FIGHTER FOR IRISH FREEDOM.

Like many great Gaels of his time he was also a great fighter for Irish freedom, and the Anglesboro' man spent a spell behind British bars for smuggling arms to the I.R.A. during the height of the War of Independence.

The first native Government, following the Treaty with Britain that established the then Irish Free State, encouraged J. J. Keane to seek from the world athletic council international recognition for Ireland as a separate nation in athletics. His efforts bore quick fruit and in 1923 Ireland was recognised as a distinct nation for all international competitions, including the Olympic Games.

A new wave of athletic prosperity soon swept through the country, and when the great revived Tailteann Games were held in 1924 under the directorship of that outstanding Gael, the late J. J. Walsh, the athletic section under J. J. Keane's leadership was predominant.

At the 1928 Tailteann, athletes were again very much to the fore, with the result that when J. J. Walsh retired from the Directorship after this great gathering, his natural successor was John J. Keane, who carried through the 1932 celebration in very fine fashion despite unfavourable world conditions that had a serious effect on any function of wide ramifications.

#### THE 1932 OLYMPIC GAMES.

The peak of Irish athletic perfection in our generation came at the 1932 Olympic Games, held at Los Angeles, California, where Pat O'Callaghan, of Duhallo, won the world's hammer title for his second successive Olympics triumph, and Bob Tisdall, of Nenagh, won the 440 yards hurdles title, breaking the time record for the event.

To see the Tri-colour floating at the Olympics was more than Britain could stomach and soon political intriguers, jealous of our international successes, were at work. The power of the Saxon eventually prevailed, and the N.A. and C.A. were outlawed because they refused to accept the Partition of their country in athletics.

J. J. Keane saw his life's work destroyed, but he continued an ardent devotee of athletics to the end. Nor did he ever lose his interest in football or hurling, for he was all down the years a familiar figure at Croke Park matches, big or small.

His much regretted passing a few months ago broke one of the few remaining links with the giants who helped to guide the G.A.A. from its time of travail into its days of greatness.