

No. 166—TOM KEANE of South Liberties

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

SOUTH Liberties are one of the oldest teams in Limerick Gaeldom, and some of the early members of this ancient and honoured Club could trace an association with hurling dating back to pre-G.A.A. days. The "Liberties" were not in existence then, but their predecessors, the first great "Shamrocks," had much to do with the introduction of hurling to Limerick. And when the "Shamrocks" dissolved the South Liberties was amongst the prolific crop of clubs that sprang into existence on the heels of the foundation of the G.A.A.

The Shamrocks had their hurling field at Rosbrien and this popular venue was mainly patronised by hurlers from Mungret, Crecora, Donoughmore and Knockea, as well as by a number from the St. Michael's Parish of the city. It was from these areas the first "Liberties" were drawn — Tom Keane hailing from Knockea, and gaining the distinction of eventually proving one of the longest serving members to wear the celebrated colours.

WON THREE FINALS IN A ROW

South Liberties played in the first five Limerick County Senior Hurling Finals, and Tom Keane figured in all of them. They won three in a row, from 1888 to 1890, lost the first great decider to Murroe, and went out before Treaty in the last of the batch, at a period when the fortunes of the club were on the decline as a result of the political repercussions of the Parnell "Split."

The "Liberties" quickly recovered from the effects of that disastrous spell in Irish and Gaelic history, and although they did not contest another final, Tom Keane and many of his grand associates figured in one of the club's proudest hours, the memorable victory over Tipperary in 1896, the year the Premier County boys won one of their greatest All-Ireland successes. On the same occasion, two brothers-in-law of Tom were also on the victorious South Liberties side — Jack and Denis Minihan.

A GRAND OLD STOCK

Tom Keane belonged to a grand old stock, who, tradition tells us, made the ancient game part of their real interest in life. He grew up with the G.A.A., was ever faithful to its teaching, and when his own great days were over, gave two fine sons, John and Michael, to carry on the proud hurling traditions of the family.

That great chronicler of the "Liberties," the late J. P. O'Rahilly, has left this memory of our subject:

"The capabilities of Tom Keane scarcely require comment; the fact that he retained his place from first to last in the career of the famous old team is quite enough. Yet we may particularly note that in addition to his great skill and honour in playing the game, he possessed in an outstanding degree the spirit of determination, a factor

so absolutely essential to the perfection of the real, natural hurler. No other game is attended with such risk, and, therefore, no game requires such spirited and determined dash, especially on important occasions, and more particularly in the more strenuous phases of the play, where, actually, life and limb do not enter into the calculations of the real determined hurler, whose desire to do his part has aroused him to the white heat of a battle charge.

THREE IMPORTANT QUALITIES

"The three important qualities that go to perfect the real gallant hurler, are honour, skill and determination, all three of which Tom Keane possessed in a very marked degree. So pronounced was the latter quality that his very features betokened the presence of the spirit of determination when the command reached him to get ready for a fixed combat, and so much was his mind absorbed in the pending conflict that nothing could produce a smile till the fight was over, when, win, lose or draw, we had the jovial Tom Keane once more.

"It is not enough for the hurler to possess this essential quality of determination. No, the exquisite spirit must be nurtured and preserved by those in command of hurling teams, that is, if the best results possible are to be reproduced. For instance, great care should be taken to see to it that no diplomatic plausibility is permitted to enter into the preliminaries of important matches, as such would be highly calculated to damage this important factor of determination, so necessary to a hurler facing a strenuous task. In fact, we all know that this applies equally to all tasks confronting men which require unbounded effort.

HAD SET GREAT HURLING HEADLINE

"In recalling the grand and noble qualities of our old hurling champion, Tom Keane, I stress again that gift of determination

which in his days of battling he preserved so well that he would not light his pipe with the one match of a friend who, for the time being, was an opponent. He set a great hurling headline in his day, and may those sublime qualities of honour, skill and determination spread from the seed that himself and his immortalised old team sowed in the County of Limerick in early G.A.A. days, when they so repeatedly won the County Championship."

BRIDGED TWO PERIODS

Tom Keane bridged two periods in the history of the "Liberties." The first "twenty-ones" were picked from such stalwarts as Jack Malone (captain), John Leonard, John Coll, Con Sheehan, Jack Rahilly, Tom Keane, John Ryan, John Coll, Con Sheehan, Jack Rahilly, Tom Keane, John Ryan, Michael Fitzgerald, James Ryan, Thomas Neville, Michael McNamara, John Hayes, Michael O'Rourke, Paddy Woods, Jack Connors, John Fitzgerald, Michael Malone, Thomas Toomey, John O'Connell, Thomas Griffin, Michael Kirby, Patrick Ryan and Michael O'Connell, and these were the lads that played such a prominent part in early hurling days by the Shannon.

SECOND GREAT TEAM

The second great team, the 1896 one, was drawn from the following:—Jimmy Flanagan (Captain), Tom Keane, Peter O'Connell, Tom Hoare, Maurice O'Shaughnessy, J. Neville, Pat Hayes, Dan Doran, J. Hartigan, J. Toomey, Jack Murphy, Jack Minihan, Denis Minihan, Tom Fitzgerald, Michael Kelly, William Fitzgibbon, M. Butler, Tim Flannery, Joe Slattery, M. Mackey, P. Flavin, M. O'Neill, Willie O'Callaghan, Paddy O'Dwyer, Jim Flood, Paddy Hehir, Johnny Hanly, Morgan O'Brien, Tom Madigan, Dan Fitzgerald.

The story of Tom Keane recalls happy days in the history of a great old club, and Tom's deeds must always remain one of the outstanding memories of an unforgettable period.