

1875 saw the third annual athletic championship meeting organised in Ireland, the organisers being the Irish Championship Athletic Club, and that meeting was memorable as the occasion of the first All-Ireland Championship victories won by that prince of Irish athletes — the late Maurice Davin.

For Limerickmen that meeting had a special significance because it was the scene of the first of a wonderful succession of All-Ireland triumphs. And to Ned O'Grady, of Ballybricken goes the honour of being the first son of Sarsfield's County to win Irish athletic pre-eminence.

The event was the pushing of the 42 lbs. weight from the shoulder, and Ned O'Grady is still there in the records as winner, at 26 ft. 1 in. Two years later he made an Irish record at the same event, his distance being 26 ft. 6 ins., which he improved, at Limerick, the following season to the splendid distance of 27 ft. 10 ins.—a remarkable achievement under the circumstances and conditions then prevailing.

EXCLUSIVE MONOPOLY OF ONE AREA.

It is an extraordinary fact, but this record has remained the exclusive monopoly of the Pallas and Ballybricken area. Ned O'Grady's Limerick figures held for ten years, until Willie Rea brought it to 28 ft. 0 ins., at the Markets Field on a memorable evening in 1888.

For thirty-four years Rea held undisputed sway, and then the great Jack O'Grady, kinsman of our subject this week, in the sheer zest of abundant vigour, attacked the long standing record and with a magnificent effort of 30 ft. 4 ins., at the Curragh Civic Guard Sports held on September 24th, 1922, set up Irish and world record figures that may never be surpassed. So the 42 lbs. record returned to the O'Grady clan.

And the chance of any man driving the record further is becoming every year more and more remote, for this event, once so popular, has been discarded, like many more typical Irish features. We pay this passive tribute to alien ideals when we cannot pursue them with active imitation. While far seeing authorities elsewhere lament the irreparable decline of once popular rural field events, we, who have still the muscle and the instinct to preserve them, voluntarily cast our own aside.

It would be sad, indeed, were the O'Grady's and their compeers to prove the last of a great race of mighty men who made the historic territory of Thomond so famous for deeds of strength and endurance. Yet, what more cheery prospect is presented for our contemplation, for if the cult and vigour Jack O'Grady inherited from his equally renowned relative, big Ned O'Grady of the 'seventies, is utterly lost, where and how can the tradition be revived.

VARIETY SUPPRESSED.

The 7lb. and 14lb. events, such favourites of Mitchel and Flanagan, had disappeared before Jack O'Grady's time. There again we are confronted with the steady elimination that is proceeding in our midst. Variety is being suppressed in our weight-throwing as in our jumping. It is no coercive force that has wrought the change; simply corrosive servility. The last generation of the O'Grady's had a world champion, thrice crowned in different weight events, and we must wonder now if the next generation will read such notices as this with the detached interest excited by the exploits of Diarmuid or Finn and an

(No. 33)—NED O'GRADY of Ballybricken

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

their peers.

Self prisoned in the topmost room, the staircase torn away,

With some brave ten of his kinsmen, the giant stood at bay

Upscaling ladders placed with care, the riflemen below

To drive the lion from his lair, the burly bailiffs go.

Vain efforts theirs to force a way, for o'er the levelled guns

Right to the shattered window frames, Big Ned O'Grady runs

Grasped by the neck each bailiff quick, down to the ground he threw

As often from that strong right arm, was hurled the "forty-two."

Trembled and bruised the bailiffs lie, nor can the armed men,

With rifles set and bayonet, that desperate passage gain

Now cheer aloud the gathering crowd, the baffled bailiffs tire

When from the hireling justice comes, the murderous order "Fire!"

"Fire then on me," O'Grady cries, "for I can stand till death,"

Oh! God: how high those fearless words, had been his latest breath.

But stung with shame the Sheriff came, and raising high his hand

Called to the craven magistrate, "withdraw that cursed command."

Then forth the giant stalks alone, His eyes with wrath aflame

You've made you're batons crowbars, And you'll suffer for the same.

And when on summer evenings, from hamlet and from hill

The gallant Gaelic peasants pour, to test their strength and skill

Where every rival mark o'er passed, the verdant sod is torn

Big Ned O'Grady's giant cast, has long the record borne.

These lines from part of old ballad, and which were written during the evictions of the Land League movement, come to mind as we recall the colourful career of Ned O'Grady.

A GREAT SUPPORTER OF PARNELL.

Ned threw his full weight into Parnell's land agitation and was present at the evictions throughout East Limerick and East Clare during that eventful period.

He had the reputation of beating back single handed an attack by a large body of police on a crowd at the Herbertstown evictions about 1887. The police charged the crowd who scattered. Ned refused to yield and beat back the attack with an ash plant, the policemen retreating before him.

On another occasion, subsequent to being evicted himself, Ned met an "Emergency man," and having

given him his deserts, a posse of twelve policemen was sent to arrest him. Accidentally, in their journey, they happened to see Ned on the same road coming in their direction. They at once turned off a different way, and allowed Ned to pass unmolested, so great was his reputation at the time as regards his physical abilities.

Ned was evicted himself from a farm at Ballybrood about 1887, after holding out from daybreak until after nightfall, following which the ballad quoted above was written. About the same period he defended single handed the eviction of a widow woman in East Clare, and held possession until nightfall, when the walls were battered in.

He remained a follower of Parnell until the end, and one day as the great Leader was passing by a local railway station, following the "Split," a few opponents had collected, and one interjected an insulting remark. Ned happened to be nearby, and finished off the interjector. The remainder fled.

These are only a few instances as regards the conditions prevailing at the time but they serve to show the general trend of things in those days—the fight the people had to carry on against landlordism and the physical abilities of Ned, who took his full part in the campaigns of the time.

A 6 FT. 3½ INS. GIANT.

Born in 1851 at Ballybricken, Ned stood about 6 ft. 3½ ins. high and weighed 17½ stones. He died in 1896, at the early age of forty-five, much lamented by his legion of friends of the Gaelic arena and his many friends of the national struggle.

He never wore shoes or togs. His custom was to throw off his boots and throw in his socks. He also let down his suspender at one side. All the weight throwing in his days, that is around the 'seventies and early eighties, seem to be put from the shoulder and there is no record of slinging between the legs or otherwise, which seem to have been introduced subsequently. They were certainly not in fashion with the local meetings of the early athletic revival days.

Athletic meetings were few and far between when Ned O'Grady was in his hey-day, and any that were held got little publicity, with the result that details of his doings are scanty.

I have already mentioned his championship win of 1875, and the Irish records which he set in 1877 and 1878. On the latter occasion he had amongst his opponents Bor and Strich, who were the English and Scotch champions.

About the same period he is reported to have won at Glasgow at putting the 42lbs., being credited with the great distance of 28ft., which, however, seems never to have been claimed as a record, although it is doubtful if this performance was ever bettered in Scotland.

In competitions at home he beat both Dr. J. C. Daly and Maurice Davin, the former, I think, at Cork, and the latter at Dublin. At Cork the distance covered was again returned at twenty-eight feet.

About 1889 a contest, arranged

by a local gentleman, Dan Gabbett of Caherconlish, brought Ned to England, where he beat the English champion at putting heavy weights and throwing light weights, presumably the 42lbs. and the 14lbs.

Putting the 42lbs. appears to have been the principal heavy weight bout of this period, and was competed for annually by the English, Scotch and Irish champions, under English championship rules. The weight of that time was an oval shaped one like an egg, with a large ring attached to one end, which rendered its propulsion extremely difficult. The ring was discarded after the formation of the G.A.A. in 1884, which made it easier to putt.

BEAT ENGLISH CHAMPION IN ENGLAND.

About 1879, Ned won at putting the 56 lb. weight at Red Bog (Ballylanders) Sports, at 24 ft. 6 ins. In later years, about 1886, following the formation of the G.A.A. he won putting the 56 lbs. at Hospital sports from W. Rea and J. S. Mitchel at about 24 feet.

Prior to the founding of the G.A.A. organised sports meetings were not very plentiful and the throwing of weights were principally carried out by local or county rivals at race meetings periodically, or at other such like venues.

Around the Munster countryside it appears that Ned O'Grady had a great reputation at these meetings, a fact testified by old veterans whenever the deeds of our athletic past are recalled. Occasionally, one can yet hear some of the old generation, when they hear of a particularly great achievement in the athletic line or other feat of strength of a present day exponent exclaim "He must be nearly as strong as Ned O'Grady," or "Twould take Ned O'Grady to do that," and other similar remarks.

At a local race meeting at Emly about 1880, Ned is reputed to have putt the 56 lb. weight 25 ft., and thrown the 14 lb. weight 61 ft. — two fine performances.

FOLLOWER OF COURSING AND HURLING.

He was also a great lover of greyhounds and was never without a couple. He attended all the coursing meetings in his time, and, in his young days one of the largest meetings in Ireland was held in his native district, Master McGrath won the Ballybricken Cup somewhere in the early 'seventies, it being traditionally said that the hare in the final course beat him and his opponent without even one turn.

A splendid hurler with the old Ballybricken team of early G.A.A. days, Ned was later an outstanding referee and had charge of many important Limerick championship tussles. A great favourite in his time, he was full of all the humour and tricks that go to make life brighter, and to this day one can hear of humorous incidents related by old people throughout East Limerick regarding him.

No. 34 — Robert J. Cussen, of Newcastle West.