

MICHAEL DEERING of Limerick

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

THE G.A.A. has had eighteen Presidents during the seventy-two years of its existence. Of these, three have been Limerickmen—Frank B. Dineen, Michael Deering and William P. Clifford, the largest number of any county; the fifteen remaining going two each to Tipperary, Clare, Kilkenny, Wexford and Antrim; and the five left, shared by Dublin, Roscommon, Cork, Waterford and Galway. The only President to die in office was Michael Deering, who, at the time of his death, March 25th, 1901, had been in office three years. He was elected at the Annual Congress in Thurles on May 22nd, 1898, succeeding another great Limerickman, the late Frank B. Dineen of Ballylanders, who resigned so that he could accept appointment as General Secretary of the Association. And the more to illustrate the big part Limerickmen then played in the affairs of the G.A.A., it might be mentioned that the late James F. Halvey of Croom was appointed a Vice-President at the same Congress.

A BIG INFLUENCE.

Although a Limerickman by birth and upbringing, it was in Cork, where he worked, that Michael came into prominence as a Gaelic administrator. Elected Chairman of the Cork County Board in November, 1891, a few months later, he became a member of the Central Council, and from that time to his all too early death, he exerted a big influence on the growth and development of the G.A.A.

He rallied Cork from the disastrous effects of the Farnell Split, re-organised her administrative forces, and at once opened a campaign to put the national games on a sound footing in the Rebel County.

IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD.

The games were still in the transition period in many areas from the free and easy endeavours of the parish to parish play. The people were only emerging from a time when they were little better than slaves, and, it was only natural that in their new found freedom discipline was loose, and incidents sometimes occurred that enemies of the games pounced on as illustrative of the inability of the Irishman to control himself.

To remove this blot on the Irish character was one of the first endeavours of the new Chairman. For the task Michael needed all his courage and tact. Clubs were tardy about complying with wishes; many proved slow to recognise his authority. Gradually, however, through his

perseverance, friendly rivalry again took the place of violence and bitterness.

GREAT GAME AT PASSAGE.

The great game at Passage, in 1896, between Redmonds and Blackrock, was among the first fruits of his labours. Often since dubbed the "match of the century"—it was hurled for a side-stake of £100—a king's ransom then.

Crowds poured into the village from early morning by every known means—horseback, pony and cart, wagonette, jaunting car, and many thousands walked the seven miles from Cork.

Practically every R.I.C. man in Cork city and district was detailed for duty in Passage, and they ordered the closing of all public houses.

A special cordon of mounted police was placed around the pitch, the Chief ordered that the game be abandoned and from the centre of the field read aloud the Riot Act.

"NO OPTION"

When he had finished he was approached by a neat, dapper figure of a man—Michael Deering. The Chief called on Michael to abandon the contest for the sake of peace. On refusing to do so, he was informed that the law had no option but to hold him responsible for the safety of every person in the field.

To fully realise the onus Michael Deering thus took upon himself, it must be remembered that the teams were enemies in politics as well as in hurling; that most of the spectators carried weapons of some kind or another; and that the police were armed. Everyone expected trouble.

Not a man in Passage that day caused Deering to regret his action. The game was a very fast and spirited display of hurling, everyone giving of his best and, if rough at times, was nevertheless, a good, clean exhibition of ball-playing. Redmonds won by a point, and everything passed off quietly, with never a hint of a scene. A great tribute, indeed, to Michael Deering.

BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA.

This incident marked the beginning of a new and brighter era in Cork sport, and within a few years Michael saw hurling in the county become the clean, manly game of which any nation might be proud.

Michael Deering was a wise administrator both in field and forum. Besides proving an outstandingly successful Chairman, he was a splendid referee and handled many important games, both club and county.

At the Annual Congress of 1897, he succeeded another well-known Limerickman—Larry Roche of Bruree, as Vice-President, and became President the following year.

Under Michael's Presidency, many reforms were effected. The rules of the Association were completely revised; championships were gradually brought up to date; old debts were cleared. The exiled Gaels were allowed appoint a Vice-President for the first time, and the choice fell on Mr. Liam McCarthy, whose memory is now commemorated in the All Ireland Senior Hurling Cup.

THE FIRST MUNSTER CONVENTION.

In 1900, Michael resigned from the Chairmanship of the Cork County Board but continued as President of the Central Council.

During this year the decision was taken to establish Provincial Councils and Michael presided at the first Munster Convention, which elected Pat McGrath of Tipperary as Chairman, and P. J. Hayes (Limerick) its Secretary. At the 1900 Congress the attendance included the late Michael Cusack, one of the founders of the Association. At that gathering a resolution was passed reaffirming that "the G.A.A. was essentially a patriotic organisation, having a patriotic mission to fulfil, and that any national project that raised itself above the plain of party strife should

enust the sympathy of the earnest Irishmen who were working together for the purpose of resisting the encroachment of English ideas in the matter of sport and preserving their national pastimes from the taint of West Britonism."

A CALL ON ARCHBISHOP CROKE.

Later on that year, Michael Deering and other members of the Association, waited on Most Rev. Dr. Croke, Archbishop of Cashel, in the Palace, Thurles, to pay their respects on behalf of the Association to its distinguished patron, then in the evening of a long and brilliant career. His Grace said that he might tell the deputation, and through them every Gael in Ireland, that as in the past he would continue to take a lively interest in fostering and promoting Irish pastimes.

Michael Deering did his work well. At a time when its destruction seemed imminent he steered the Association to safety and security. A man of sterling character and true national principles, Michael's name ranks high in the annals of the G.A.A.

I recently visited his grave in St. Joseph's Cemetery, Cork, where a fine memorial stands to this great Gael. A Celtic Cross, with Croppy pikes, a hurley and ball, entwined with shamrocks and a raised harp, the inscription reads: "To the memory of Michael Deering, President of the G.A.A. Died March 25th, 1901. Erected by the Gaels of Munster. God save Ireland."

No. 172

10th March 1956