

**No. 128—TOMMY HERBERT Of Sallymount**

**By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.**

**T**RADITION has a strong hold on our Irish people, and we may thank tradition for favouring us with the knowledge that the game called "Hurling Home" was carried on in Castleconnell parish more than a hundred years ago.

The chief centre for this game was in Coffey's field, Sallymount—just opposite the home of the Herberts, the well-known hurling family.

Coming into the early 'eighties, when alien games were beginning to take up the time of the young people, the present hurling game was introduced by Rev. P. M. O'Kelly, C.C., ably supported by Anthony Mackey and Pat Lee. A few old timers still recall matches played by local teams, selected by Messrs. Mackey and Lee in the once famous high field, for prizes subscribed locally. Michael Mackey, "Tyler's" father and Dan Lee, in turns captained the Castleconnell team in those early days, when twenty-one players took part in the contests.

**CASTLECONNELL CUP**

The Castleconnell Cup drew teams from every quarter, but, as far as I can gather, the competition did not finish satisfactorily. I know that the once famous Garraiboy team, near Killaloe, took a leading part; also, that the Castleconnell men later won a decisive victory over the Clare team, outside O'Brien's Bridge, which caused great joy in the Castleconnell area.

The team, under Michael Mackey's captaincy, soon became recognised as one of the best in East Limerick. They defeated Dromkeen and Pallas, in Caherconlish but lost to South Liberties, chiefly due to the hurling prowess of a famous athlete, the late Johnny Coll, who played for Liberties, but was a native of Castleconnell parish.

Caherline boasted a famous combination then. The Castleconnell lads held them well in the "Poor House" field where Landsdowne Park now stands, but, unfortunately, the match was interrupted by parties not belonging to either team.

Willie F. Lee ("Thomond") played between the posts at those matches and Mike Ryan was a famous full back. The latter was father of Jacky Ryan, often spoken of even to the present day as the brilliant goalkeeper in the famous Castleconnell selection, whose splendid defences will never be forgotten in Munster hurling.

**PARNELL SPLIT**

Castleconnell slumbered for a spell around the period of the disastrous Parnell split and it was near the turn of the century before we again find them in the hurling picture—the team then including John ("Tyler") Mackey and his brothers; Sean Carroll and brothers; the Herberts of Sallymount, the Galligans, Jim Lee, Martin Carty, Mick Sweeney, Denny Dillane, Barney O'Connor, Mick Kett, Davy Conway, the Vaughans, the Collinses and Mick Danaher of Ahane, Tom Griffin, Jacky Ryan, Tom Brennan, Willie Bourke, Sim Scully, Tommy Benn, Martin Doherty, Tom Coffey, Joe Curtin and Tom Bresnihan.

Like many of our race, some of those fine Gaels had to face foreign countries to earn a livelihood, but those at home persevered in the games of the Gael, winning many victories in championship and tournament. Their matches with the famous teams of their heyday—Fedamore, Young Ireland's, Croom, Monégay, Caherline, Cappamore and Ballingarry, in the old famed Markets Field are often the subject of conversation even yet at many crossroad and fireside gatherings.

**MOST COLOURFUL ACHIEVEMENT**

Perhaps the most remarkable and colourful achievement of that grand Castleconnell side was the success of their famous selection in once more bringing Limerick to the forefront in the hurling world following its long slumber, since the Kilfinane pick won the All-Ireland Championship in 1897.

The Tralee Sports Field in 1910 saw Limerick come to the front in the premier game when the Castleconnell led side defeated the famous "Rockies." This great victory created quite a surprise. Old Limerick hurling enthusiasts still recall that evening and talk of the many little knots of Cork en-

thusiasts on the Tralee streets who were still trying to realise hours later that Limerick had snatched the laurels and become Munster champions.

That was a great Shannonside team, and one that certainly should have captured the Blue Riband. But luck was all against them and Wexford slipped in for a narrow All-Ireland success, more through incompetent umpiring than real merit on the victors' part.

**AGAIN SECURED MUNSTER CROWN**

Limerick proved their hurling prowess once more in 1911 and again secured the Munster crown. Fixed to play Kilkenny in the All-Ireland Final at Cork, they found the pitch a quagmire and play impossible. The Central Council changed the venue to Thurles but Limerick insisted that the re-fixtue should be for Cork. The Shannonsiders persisted in their refusal to play outside Cork and eventually were forced to concede a walk-over—and were suspended into the bargain, thus letting their Munster title go by default as well.

The tragedy of it all was demonstrated at Dublin some time later, when Limerick had a handsome win over Kilkenny for the Cardinal's medals, a game that was generally regarded as a 'who shall' between counties that have always proved such drawing cards for the hurling crowds.

**TOMMY HERBERT**

Tommy Herbert of Sallymount was one of the leading lights of the early Castleconnell teams of the present century and later provided one of the golden links for the record breaking Ahane fifteens who made such hurling history in the 'thirties and 'forties.

In the thick of the fight for Gaelic games all through the early years of the century, the Herbert family played a noble part in keeping the hurling going and were at times the apex around which the entire organisation in the district revolved.

Castleconnell supremacy was very marked in the first decade of the nineteen hundreds, and when Ahane came so wonderfully into the hurling picture in the third and fourth decades, it was a real tonic to find that tradition and the backing and advice of many of the olden stalwarts played such a big part in putting them to the front and keeping them there for a spell without precedent in the hurling history of Shannonside.

**LOVABLE CHARACTER**

Tommy Herbert was one of the men that held the Castleconnell flag high when good men were badly needed in an Ireland that had little place for our games, and it was that same lovable character, who, in later times, witnessed the full triumph of the cause he served so well, and the growth in power and influence of the association that struggled so manfully in the vital years when it had not a field, or even a shilling, at times, which it could call its own.

It was Sallymount that had the parish representation when Castleconnell first won the County crown. And when we think of Sallymount, a name is certain to come up. It is Herbert, and so it continued down the years. They were almost interwoven—hurling: Herbert: Sallymount!

**IMPORTANT DAY**

May 1st, 1901, was an important day in the hurling life of the district. At the Markets Field that evening Sallymount beat Rivers-town (Ferrybridge) 2-9 to 2-5 in the senior county championship semi-final, with that grand Gael, Jack Murphy, of the Commercials, as referee.

They were in their first County final, not played, however, until December 8th, 1901, when Rathkeale beat them 2-4 to 2-3. The west, however, slipped up somewhere. Anyway, an appeal to the County Board followed—a replay was ordered, and Sallymount won easily this time.

Two Herberts helped in that championship success—Tommy and Joe—the other fifteen being: D. Dillane, M. Kett, J. Mackey, R. Lee, W. Galligan, D. Galligan, S. Carroll, J. McMahon, J. Bourke, W. Daly, J. McNamara, M. Daly, M. O'Rourke, J. Kearney, M. McCarthy.

**CHURCH DIGNITARY**

On a visit to Birmingham some years before the second great world war, I happened to meet an important English Church dignitary—a great builder of churches and schools, and bearing many Papal honours in recognition of his service to the Church.

When he learned I was from Limerick a new light came into his ageing eyes and the old exile immediately switched the conversation to hurling. We discussed many games and players in the mellow evening calm. The great churchman was a boy again in his native Mooncoin, as he recalled the deeds of "Drug" Walsh and the beautiful Gaelic poetry of Father James Dollard.

Then he talked of poor Peadar Clancy, and said that his most vivid hurling recollections were centered around the Castleconnell district. He loved the hurling and assured me that to talk of the olden days brought back to him happy, holy memories of an Ireland where sport was not commercialised but played for the sheer love of our native games.

**MEMORIES**

He went on: "Memory fails me in many aspects after nearly fifty years, but I can still see Martin Carty in the Castleconnell goal and Bill and Dave Galligan, with Mick Sweeney; Tommy, Jimmy, and Joe Herbert, led by the unconquerable 'Tyler' Mackey—I remember even old Jack Mackey playing, rushing on the opponents' goal as top forward. Other names, too, came back—Colonel Dillane and Mick Kett, Brosnahan and Mick Danaher. Many a journey I went with them to the Markets Field, oftentimes on foot, and Scariff, and Killaloe and Cappamore, and were lucky at the time if we had a 'tanner' between the lot of us."

**STILL HAPPILY WITH US**

That grand old Birmingham priest, still happily with us, told me he had an uncle, Joe Buckley, who played with the old St. John's football team. He well remembered the photo of that famed combination which long adorned the walls of his home.

Half a dozen years ago last January Tommy Herbert passed to the great beyond, a widely mourned figure.

I cannot do better in finishing this little tribute to his memory than to quote the closing words of the kindly Birmingham saggart: "I retain many happy unforgettable memories of old halcyon days of heartsome and homely Gaelic re-unions. Alas, many of the old brigade of those pleasant days and nights are gone and my heart goes to their blessed memory. To those that survive I send warmest greetings and heartfelt thanks for the memory. May God be with them all."