

Great Limerick Athletes

No. 98—T. D. SHANAHAN of Monagea

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

"Call out the names of hurlers bold—
The boys we used to know—
Tho' some I fear, are missing now,
Since nigh fifty years ago,
Perhaps a few may still survive
The storms, the aches and strife,
While more have drifted far from there,
On the rolling sea of life."

SO wrote Limerick's poet Gael, T. D. Shanahan, a short time before his death a dozen years ago, concerning the Limerick hurlers—he used to know in stirring Gaelic days, long, long ago by Shannon-side. And further on, he penned:

"But oft I think of dear old times,
Yet longings are all in vain,
Youth's days are fled, lov'd friends are dead—
We shall never meet again!"

And then the sad news flashed over the ether from far-off California that the great Gaelic poet was no more.

"And once again has the summons come
For a staunch West Limerick Gael,
Whose caman rang in the years ago—
Thru many a Munster vale;
Whose name and fame from many a lip
Rang out in the days gone by,
God's Will be done! But its hard, indeed,
That a Gael like you must die."

EARLY DAYS IN MONAGEA.
T. D. Shanahan was one of the earliest pioneers of the G.A.A. in his native Monagea, and has left us, in his own words, the story of the uprise of the Association in West Limerick:

"'Twas on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1886 that my heart first thrilled at the introduction of Erin's glorious pastimes in the town of Newcastle West. Two matches, one of hurling and one of football, were scheduled to be played on that afternoon in the demesne grounds, kindly given for the occasion by Mr. Charles Curling.

"The football match was played first; it was between Kilcolman and a Limerick City team, St. Michael's. Everybody was much interested as it introduced the new rules and the game resulted in a draw. The players got quite an ovation and it was a very interesting match. But the greatest event and the star attraction of the day was when forty-two hurlers, twenty-one to the side, marched into the field, led by the Newcastle West Band and the Boherbuoy Band of Limerick. The hurling teams represented the Faughs of North Adare and some city team—I quite forget which one now—and when they lined up it was a wonderful sight to behold. The vast gathering of people from all the surrounding parishes, went wild with excitement, hats were in the air, and every clever display of manly skill and gallant defence was cheered to the echo. The great game went on and on and . . . it is still going. The next day and all that week the people spoke of nothing but the great games—especially the hurling.

THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY.

"The following Sunday after the last Mass in Monagea, young men and grown boys under the watchful eye and the able guidance of William Hough (whose son, the noted Limerick hurler, is now Treasurer of the Munster Council, G.A.A.) and Dan McEnery, enrolled under the colours of the Red and Green, and organised the William O'Brien Hurling and Football Club. By the end of two weeks, the Lord Edwards of Newcastle, the St. Ita's of Ashford, joined the ranks, and Clubs quickly followed in Knockaderry, Feenagh, Feohenagh, Ballygarry, Ardagh, Broadford, Kilmeevy and Drmcollagher.

"John O'Connell and Daniel Kennedy, of Camas, staunch assistants to William Hough and Dan McEnery soon had the new Club doing practice games on every Sunday afternoon—an hour at hurling and an hour at football. After some few months of diligent and strenuous toil behind a hurley the boys thought the time was at hand for the invasion of some neighbouring teams' happy hunting ground, and finally they got their wish. A tournament was organised in Rathkeale, and it was arranged that Monagea would meet Kilfinane.

AUSPICIOUS DAY.

At last the auspicious day dawned, and at least half the parish turned out and travelled to Rathkeale to see their team in action. When the whole crowd arrived at the Commons of Rathkeale a football match was on, but some officials of the tournament soon came around and announced that the next match on the list was Monagea and Kilfinny. Instantly all was life and bustle, and in a very short time we were ready for the fray, all radiant in our new jackets of red and green. In a little while we were lined up

against Kilfinny—a seasoned team of experienced players who knew all the tricks of the game. Monagea made a very creditable showing and put up a fairly good defence but tact and experience were against them, so they met defeat. I remember that when the match was over the captain of the Kilfinny team came into the corner where we were dressing and complimented us on the fine showing we made on our first appearance. It was really very nice of him and showed both good and clean sportsmanship.

WENT INTO EXTENSIVE TRAINING.

"The William O'Briens did not let that first defeat drive them to despair. On the contrary, they went into intensive training not only on Sundays but every evening of the week and after a few months more they had developed a team that shone on many a

field. One of the finest football games of those days was played in the summer of 1887, in the Demesne, between Castlemahon and Kanturk, and another great game played the same day and on the same grounds was between the old rivals, Feenagh and Knockaderry.

"Monagea discontinued the football team in 1890, and went in exclusively for hurling, and for the next two years the ring and clash of their camans was heard in mostly every parish throughout West Limerick. When I left Ireland in 1892 they had a strong team, well managed and entirely able to take care of itself. I had the great honour of captaining the side from its inception to the time of my departure, the vice-captain being Daniel Begley, of Gardenfield. Chairman of the Club was William Hough; Daniel McEnery was next in command, with Daniel Kennedy, Secretary, and J. P. O'Connell, organiser.

THE PLAYERS.

As players, I recall the following: John Begley, Con Begley, Jerry Reidy, Thomas McEnery, William Kelly, Stephen Drynane, John Dore, Patrick Nash, Jerry J. Curtin, Patrick Enright, John O'Connell, John P. McCarthy, Denis Halpin, Luke Keefe, Patrick Kenneally, Eugene O. King, Maurice Madigan, Daniel Connors, Patrick P. Enright, James Enright, Ned McEssey, Patrick Ryan, Thomas Shanahan, Ned Anglim, Patrick W. King, David Pickley, Patrick Collins, Roger Green, Daniel Shaughnessy.

"Hurling, in my estimation, was the most manly of all athletic games, and has a whole lot to do in developing the muscles and physique,—the springy step and quick determination that are invariably a passport to the Police Department and the Fire Department in many a city in this great United States."

During fifty years of exile in far away California, T. D. Shanahan followed the fortunes of the G.A.A. with a devotion that has hardly an equal. The long years failed to damp his enthusiasm, a scores of letters in my possession from him amply testify. Though we never met, we kept up a regular correspondence of many years standing, and from him I learned much about the sporting activities of Irishmen in the "Greater Ireland beyond the seas."

IN FAR FOREIGN FIELDS.

In the distant Los Angeles of film fame, there is a grand number of the old Limerick hurling school—Father John O'Donnell, who figured in the 1913 Cardinals' medals victory over Kilkenny—one of the most talked of matches of that era. Stretching across the well nigh five hundred miles to San Francisco, we hit the next colony of Gaels—and they have proved tried and true, as demonstrated at the last International rally, on the occasion of the never to be forgotten trip of the Tipperary hurlers—the only tour that ever carried the Gaelic code to the far western outpost of a great continent.

In California the games of the Gael have legion adherents, and the St. Mary's College at Moraga, under the guidance of the Irish Christian Brothers, had a famous hurling club—the only one of its day in any College in the United States. Under the management of Brother James Shanahan of Tipperary, and Ossian Dinneen, a Limerickman and former pupil of St. Munchin's College, the St. Mary's hurlers had victories over the "Shamrocks" of Oakland, who boasted many experienced players from Ireland, and over every hurling club in the fine Irish city of San Francisco, only meeting defeat at the hands of the Cork team, veterans and victors of many a hard-fought clash on native soil, the majority of whom figured against the Tipperary tourists when they "invaded" the "Golden State." T. D. Shanahan gloried in the doings of the "St. Mary's" and found congenial company amongst the Brothers there, the majority of whom hailed from the Munster counties—chiefly Kerry, Cork and Limerick.

WIDE INTERESTS.

A quick glance through the reams of paper that constitute the letters I have accumulated from far away

Berkeley, reveals a variety of sporting interests hard to surpass. He honoured all the great home Gaelic sides when he wrote:

"Here's to each Gael from the Golden Vale
And their hurling records grand!
Their deathless fame at that Tailteann Game
Sheds glory all over the land!
Swift passes, too, and an eye that's true—
And a dash to do or die,
While sliotars ring to the camans' swing
Send the green flag soaring high.
How memories come from the years ago
Of where famed teams used to be—
Dungourney's might and the records bright
Of the "Rockies" by the Lee—
Of Moycarkey and Boherlahan lads,
Yes, Tallow and "Ireland's Own,"
And of Tulla's thrills, and Callaghan's Mills—
Three Castles and Tullaroan

I'm thinking of Dublin's wondrous teams
And of "Boys of Wexford" fame,
And of Galway's sons and of Cavan men—
All past masters of the game.
Ah, Louth and Kildare play'd fair and square
In Croke Park by Liffey's side,
'Gainst that classic team o'er which glory gleams—
"Laune Rangers"—the Kingdom's pride!

May God bless each Gael from the Golden Vale—
All true sons of Garryowen—
From the borders down to that grand old town
That treasures the Treaty Stone,
And when next you come to the U.S.A.,
Hit the trail out West until you reach the State by the Golden Gate—
We're longing to see your skill!"

HONOURED LIMERICK'S FAME.

Of Limerick's hurling prowess, T. D. Shanahan was ever proud. He could name every member of all the great teams from Kilfinane of '97 fame, along down the glory years of Castleconnell, Croom, Fedamore, Young Ireland, Newcastle West to the Ahane heroes of a hundred battles. And when Limerick went to America in the early summer of 1935, "T.D." greeted them with the following:

"A fond Cead Mile Failte
To Limerick's hurling men—
The peerless caman-wielders
From hillside town and glen;
Their wondrous deeds are spoken
At home and far away;
They're with us—Erin's champions—
They're welcome here, to-day.

"Who has not heard of Limerick
The spot from whence they came,
And all the deathless glory
That lingers round its name?
Where women smote their invaders
On Walls of Garryowen,
And conquered Britain's hirelings
Bear witness—Treaty Stone!

The place where Sean Og Hanley
And Cott'rell blazed the way;
Where Hough and "Tyler" Mackey
Led victors in the "fray";
Where hurlers all are heroes
In Tailteann game so grand—
We hail them and proclaim them
The glory of the land!

That game of kings and chieftains
Embellished history's page,
'Twas sung by bard and harper
And lauded by the sage,
For oft on field of Tara
The hurlers of the vale
Performed deeds astounding
That glorified the Gael.

Once more—Cead Mile Failte
To sons of Garryowen,
The pride of caman wielders
From by the Treaty Stone;
True Gaels from by that city
Where Sarsfield led the way.
With heart and hand we greet them—
They're welcome here, to-day!

FROM ONE OF HIS LAST LETTERS.

And to conclude this little sketch of a dear departed friend, I quote one of his last letters:
"My memories and impressions of the old hurling days are as fresh just now, though fifty years has intervened since I had the honour of being in my last line-up, at Ardagh, in 1891, when our old team did honours for Monagea against Newbridge, or Ballysteen, or maybe Barrigone or—was it a selection of all three—combined? The hurling was tough in those long lost days I am thinking of so wistfully, and when a fellow's 'hurling blood' was up and the echo of that old deathless slogan came ringing in from the side lines, and neighbours' exhortations stirred your very heart to 'up and do' for the honour of your parish and the colour that you wore—well, we are all but humans,

and human nature at best, and under such circumstances, is rather weak.

"But thank God, and I saw it for myself, that the rules are now strictly adhered to. Yes, I saw it at Kezar Stadium, San Francisco, on June 13th, 1926, when Tipperary played the 'All Stars' of California. And I must say, proudly and justly so—that wonderful improvements have taken place; the G.A.A. games as played nowadays are the very essence of perfection, both in science, grace and skill, and they are bound to endure while the deathless fame and heroic names of Tom Semple, Sean Og Hanley, and our own beloved 'Tyler' Mackey drift downward through the golden avenue of time. The games have come to stay in Ireland, in America, and in the Land of the Southern Cross."