

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 3)—TIM AHEARNE of Athea

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

NEARLY fifty years ago a new pupil, by name Tim Ahearne, entered his name on the roll at St. Michael's College, Listowel.

He was only a short time there when the "College sports" were held. On the eve of the meeting a few of the senior pupils, with the Reverend President, were laying out the ground for the jumps and had completed the digging of the "landing" spots. The boys jumped to test the spaces marked out and everything looked right.

Then some more boys approached to see the jumps. Amongst them was Tim Ahearne. He also jumped, and to the surprise of all he did not "land" on the spot prepared, but some two feet beyond it, on the hard ground. No other boy in the College could jump outside the mark. That was the first indication of the coming athlete.

AMAZING COLLECTION OF TROPHIES.

Tim Ahearne was born in the remote district where the Ahearne homestead is fixed among the glens of Upper Dreen. And there to this day is an amazing collection of prizes and medals beautifully housed but with no accompanying script. They represent achievements of which the greatest in the land could be proud.

Tim Aherne was an outstanding member of that galaxy of jumping stars that made Ireland famous in this department the world over. In both the broad and high jump, he had in and out successes with the famous Leahy brothers, but the running hop, step and jump was his best event.

The triple leap has always been a favourite test with youth and manhood in Ireland, and it was mainly through Irish influence in America that it found its place on the Olympic programme.

A list of the foremost exponents of either event includes a wonderful array of men upon whose achievements our athletic fame securely rests.

First of our champions was Dan Shanahan, of Kiltinne, whose record leap of 50 ft. 0½ in. at the All-Ireland championships of 1888, at Limerick, is yet the best performance of the native arena.

Other Limerick men to follow Shanahan, who won the title on five occasions, were Denis Carey, Paddy McNamara, Paddy and Con Leahy, John Joe Bresnihan and Tim Ahearne.

All these have been champions of Ireland in this distinctively Irish accomplishment. Each was a beautiful exponent and master of many more events besides. They are only the most noteworthy, and far from all of the brilliant band who starred in the three jumps and maintained Ireland's supremacy the world over. And it does not include another grand Limerick man, and kinsman of Tim—Dan Ahearne of Athea—who long held the world's record in both styles.

MADE OLYMPIC AND BRITISH RECORD.

Popularly known as the "Kerry shot" by many of his athletic friends of the long ago, Tim Ahearne made an Olympic and British record when he won the hop, step and jump event at the

Olympic Games held in London in 1908, his distance being 48 ft. 11½ ins. Tim was then twenty-two years old. He stood 5 ft. 7 ins. in height and weighed nine stone.

In 1909, he won the English Broad Jump Championship at 22 ft. 1½ ins. In America, he won many championships which may be briefly summed up in the records established there for the hop, step and jump—an indoor one of 48 ft. 2½ ins. in 1910, and an outdoor of 50 ft. in 1913.

In Ireland his championship successes were:—1907, running hop, step and jump, 48 feet 4 inches; running broad jump, 23 feet 2½ inches, and tied with M. J. Creede, of Elton, in the running high jump at 5 feet 11 inches. 1908, Running broad jump, 23 feet 1½ inches. 120 yards hurdles, 16 4-5th seconds. 1909, Running broad jump, 22 ft. 5 ins.; running high jump, 5 feet 10½ inches, 120 yards hurdles, 16 3-5th secs.

Tim took his jumping very seriously and the manner in which he prefaced his short run to the high jump in an effort to work himself up to a high state of nervous tension was a characteristic that will be remembered by all those that saw him perform.

THE ATHLETIC STRAIN BRED IN HIM.

That Tim Aherne had the athletic strain bred in him may be concluded as the result of a little incident which occurred more than three score years ago.

One morning as people were going home from Mass an argument arose between Brown, John Mullane and the father of Tim Aherne. Tim's father, to prove his point, jumped from one pier to the other at Synan's gate. It was, of course, a standing jump and must have measured eleven feet, and none of the other young men of the district then could better it. That it was a splendid performance will be appreciated by the fact that Irish championships in this event have been won at as low as 9 feet 6 inches, whilst the best is around the 11 feet 4½ inches mark.

Now through the glen of Upper Dreen runs the River Galey (Abha na Gaile—River of the Morning Mist). Around on every side the hills thrust their purple peaks into the fleecy clouds, and there lies a short stretch of the river across which only two men of the parish were known to jump cleanly from bank to bank.

One of these men was William Kane; the other was John Dan Shine. Both were cousins of Ahearne.

A RIVER LEAP.

When Tim returned from Listowel, moved undoubtedly by the College sports incident, he went to this river leap and cleared the jump, bank to bank, perfectly. On

measuring this jump it was found to be twenty-one feet, the river being about twenty feet wide at the point.

The other pair were, of course, long past their prime in Tim's day, but the jump remained and only the three aforesaid could claim success.

Was there not, too, a touch of romance about young Ahearne going to join issue with whatever deity presides over the river of the Morning Mist, out-soaring the mists, as it were? Incidents like this are in the best tradition of the old Celtic race, with something reminiscent of Cuchulainn, Fionn Mac Cumhall and Eamhain Macha about them.

Born in 1886, Tim Ahearne was just eighteen when he won two prizes at Listowel sports on July 27th, 1904. A month later he took a prize from a Limerick City meeting.

The following year he had four outings, securing treble honours at Listowel and Ardfer, chalking up a double at Castleisland and gaining one trophy at Tralee.

A Press notice of Listowel sports held on August 5th, 1906, reads: "T. J. Ahearne created a surprise and his performances were certainly almost sensational. He began by winning the 100 yards, then, after a hard contest, with such men as Bourke, of Dromcollogher; Creede, Joe Leahy and Bresnihan, he won the high jump, getting over 5 ft. 10 ins., and crowned these by jumping 23 ft. 11 ins. in the broad jump."

A TOP-NOTCH SEASON.

1907 was a top notch season for the Athea lad. In addition to the championship successes earlier enumerated, he won the all round championship of Munster at Fermoy, and brought numerous prizes from meetings at Ennis, Tralee, Milltown, Killorglin, Cobh, Dingle, Dromcollogher and Castlemahon.

The following year saw his Olympic Games success at Shepherd's Bush, London, when he won the hop, step and jump with a leap of 48 ft. 11½ ins.—an Olympic and British record. And it was not the only one made at that Games by a Limerick man, for John Flanagan threw the hammer 170 ft. 1½ ins. to also set up new figures.

Second to Tim Ahearne was Mac Donald of Canada at 48 ft. 5½ ins., with Larson from the land of the midnight sun, third at 47 ft. 2½ ins. In addition to the standard prize, the Athea man got a commemorative medal recording the new achievement, two diplomas, and a Royal sprig of oak from Windsor Forest, presented by King Edward.

Amongst many notable 1908 performances was his double championship success, and two other important international championship appearances, the first at Edinburgh as a member of

the Irish team for the annual contest with Scotland, in which he won the broad jump and the hurdles, besides filling second place in the high jump, and the second at Ballsbridge against America, and in which he secured two Irish successes.

A TREBLE CHAMPIONSHIP ACHIEVEMENT.

As another year rolled along, Tim signalled its passing by a treble championship achievement, afterwards, winning the British title for the broad jump and filling second place in the high jump, thus becoming holder of Lord Alverston's cup, and on which his name can still be read. He was again a member of the Irish team against Scotland, winning the broad and high jumps for the land of the shamrock.

He became very popular with cross-Channel fans and competed at St. Alban's, where he won three events, and also at meetings organised in successive weeks by the great rivals, Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic—and at each of which he was a winning lists.

But his best performance was at Adare, where he covered no less a piece of ground than 25 ft. 3 ins. in the broad jump. It was a world's record, but never gained recognition owing to some technical difficulty.

Then he emigrated, and we must follow him to the Western Continent for the balance of his active athletic career.

With Tim we must visit New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Chicago, Massachusetts and as far north even as Montreal in Canada.

In the latter part of 1909 he won a few indoor prizes, but a pulled tendon kept him immobile for most of the following year.

WORKED BACK TO HIS OLD FORM.

1911, however, made ample and noble amends. Competing for the New York Athletic Club, he quickly worked back to his old form, and at the Metropolitan Championships held in New York he won both the broad and hop, step events.

At Baltimore, Maryland, a little later the same month, he was second to his kinsman, Dan, in the National Championship of the hop step.

A trip to Montreal was eminently successful, and he returned with the Canadian Championship in the broad jump to his credit. Tim won more prizes this year than ever before.

He led the New York Athletic Club by scoring for that combination the greatest number of points in the season. For this achievement he received a solid bronze trophy—2ft. 6ins. high—an emblem of the "Winged Foot" of the New York Club, and very valuable.

A visit to the homeland in 1912 kept him out of the American arena, but he was back again the following year, when, as also in 1914, he won several prizes, including championships, at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, and Chicago.

Thus concluded a grand career of successful endeavour by one of the grandest figures to adorn the athletic stage—Timothy J. Ahearne of Athea.

No. 4—Paddy Leahy of Cregane.