

No. 182—Right Rev. Stephen Canon Connolly, P.P.,

V.G., of Meanus

WHEN Cork and Limerick met at Thurles in the early summer of 1938, to fight out another great Munster Championship test, the ball was set rolling by one of the greatest Limerick churchmen of his day—the late Right Rev. Stephen Canon Connolly, P.P., V.G., Dean of Limerick and Parish Priest of Newcastle West.

In mid-July that same year, when Cork and Limerick contested the Munster junior hurling and football semi-finals in Dromcollogher, the teams wore crepe armlets in tribute to the memory of Dean Connolly, who had died in a Dublin nursing home the previous day.

Born at Meanus, Bruff, in 1872, Stephen Connolly displayed from his early childhood many symptoms of that saintliness which was such an outstanding characteristic of his entire life.

Receiving his early education in Bruff, he subsequently attended St. Munchin's College, Limerick, and completed his studies for the priesthood at Maynooth, where he was ordained in 1897.

ON THE ENGLISH MISSION FIELD.

His early service was on the English Mission, being attached to the Westminster Diocese under the late Cardinal Vaughan. His first Limerick appointment was to the curacy at Mahoonagh, where the older of the parishioners still speak of him with an affection and endearment that have not mellowed with the years.

Before the new century was a decade old he was transferred to the Cathedral Parish of St. John's in Limerick City, where he served as curate, chaplain and administrator, successively.

In 1926 he was appointed Parish Priest of Parteen, being shortly afterwards transferred to Adare, where he laboured successfully for ten years, before moving to Newcastle West, where his many noble characteristics manifested themselves in a variety of ways in his unceasing endeavours to promote the spiritual and temporal welfare of his parishioners.

ARDENT FOLLOWER OF NATIVE GAMES.

Throughout his whole lifetime Dean Connolly was an ardent follower and active supporter of Gaelic pastimes, and on every occasion on which the opportunity presented itself he threw himself wholeheartedly into any movement which was intended for the promotion of the native games.

He was a keen supporter of the Limerick teams at all times, and evinced much pride in the many deeds of prowess and achievement that made the name of Limerick so famous on hurling and athletic fields both at home and across the seas.

He was a regular attender at

practically all County and Munster championship fixtures and was scarcely ever known to be absent from Croke Park on the occasion of an All-Ireland hurling or football final. In fact, he was as much at home in Croke Park as at a minor or schools fixture in his native county.

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

Popularly known as "Father Connolly"—he never got any other title from some of his old Gaelic admirers, who preferred the familiar "Father" and the Dean, I think, liked it that way as well.

For many years he laboured in the cause of religion and nationality, and while giving the major portion of his time to his holy and religious duties, he never forgot that his country had next claim in his generous and lovable nature.

DID TROJAN WORK FOR THE G.A.A.

It was not surprising then to find him an absolute enthusiast as far as Gaelic games were concerned. He did trojan work in the cause of the Gael and was always closely identified with the G.A.A. He organised many tournaments, and games for the "Father Connolly medals" will long be discussed.

When Newcastle West won the County crown in 1917 they broke from tradition by refusing to select the Limerick team themselves. In nominating the first Co. Selection Committee they included the name of Father Connolly, and the team this Committee picked eventually won All-Ireland honours.

Dean Connolly's work for Gael-dom will never be fully appreciated, for much of it was accomplished far from the limelight and at a period when backing Gaelic games was not the most popular thing in city or county—not to count the "poor view" the British occupation authorities took of such action.

As a priest, Dean Connolly devoted his life to God, and as a true Gael he took the motto: "Next to God I love thee, Erin, my native land."

His heart and soul were with those who in time of peace sought to hasten the day when freedom would once again be ours, and in the more stirring times of war was always found in the "bearnna baoghail."

REMARKABLE KINDLINESS.

He had a remarkable kindness towards all people and was possessed of that eagerness of heart and mind that is so rare and can only be said to be the gift of the few.

His untimely death was a big blow to Gaeldom. The hurlers and footballers, as well as the older

Gaels, missed the kindly, gentle priest, whom they were always safe in calling friend but his memory must live in many hearts and act as an inspiration to cherish and work for the games and traditions he loved so well.

His funeral was a striking manifestation of public grief; members of his beloved county team formed a guard of honour and the coffin was covered with a beautiful floral tribute in the form of a large Celtic cross from the County Board—a token, if only in poor and halting terms, of the esteem in which he was held by the Gaels.

TRIBUTE AT COUNTY BOARD MEETING.

Moving the adjournment of the County Board meeting out of respect to his memory, Mr. Tim Humphreys said they had lost a life-long supporter of the games, who was, in fact, one of the greatest supporters they had. He always took a very keen interest in the county hurling team and it could be said of him that his presence on the hurling field at inter-county matches gave much encouragement and often led to victory. For nearly two score years he had assisted and supported them, and his passing was the greatest loss the Association had suffered for many years.

Continuing, Mr. Humphreys said that the late Dean was a most amiable and lovable clergyman and one of the grandest students of human nature he had ever met. In Limerick City, where he had ministered for many years, he had been a great friend to the poor. He helped several charities through the Association and put up many sets of medals in aid of worthy objects. In 1918, when the Association was in very low water, financially and otherwise, he helped in composing their differences and then was instrumental in getting funds to train the County team at Foynes for the All-Ireland final, which Limerick won.

HIS WORK FOR THE GAMES IN NEWCASTLE WEST.

Dean Connolly brought with him to Newcastle West his sterling qualities as a great Gael. Arriving there at a time when the national games were at a low ebb in the district, he immediately sought to infuse into the local club a sense of the great traditions it had inherited from the past. When he attended the annual meetings he spoke in endearing terms of the many fine achievements of local hurlers and the part they had played in the past history of the Association in Limerick.

His post was Honorary President of the Club but his interest was active and enduring. Constantly in touch with the members, he was an inspiration and a hope and his encouragement laid the foundation of a revival which was stifled by his untimely death.

Another project that suffered by his passing was the establishment of a proper Gaelic grounds in the town. Through his generous co-operation and lively interest the way was made clear for the establishment of a new Gaelic Park in the Demesne Grounds.

It is a slur on the entire parish of Newcastle West that this project has not been brought to fruition. It was the final ambition of a great life devoted to the cause of Gaeldom, and Newcastle West will not live true to its greatest traditions until it raises a worthy arena that it will be proud to dedicate to the memory of a true pastor and patriot.