

No. 216—Most Rev. Patrick O'Neill, D.D.,

Late Bishop Of Limerick

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

WHEN the crozier fell from the lifeless grasp of a great Bishop of Limerick, the late Most Rev. Patrick O'Neill, D.D., there passed to his heavenly reward not only a great scholar and Churchman, but a patriotic Irishman, who brought honour and renown to his native Limerick on hurling and athletic fields in days that cannot come again.

When Ireland's national colours appeared in the Vatican for the first time, at the Beatification of Blessed Oliver Plunkett, they were presented by the then Rev. Dr. O'Neill. At that time the colours were banned in Ireland. At the ceremony of Beatification, the traditional bouquet, consisting of a beautiful arrangement of green, white and orange specially selected flowers, was presented.

Turning away from the graveside at Mount St. Lawrence last Saturday, I met a pair of great Fedamore and Limerick hurlers—Willie Gleeson and Paddy Clohessy. The latter reminded me of a photograph in my possession of the 1912 Fedamore team, winners of the Murphy Cup and medals, Infirmary and Band Challenge Cups and Lyons Memorial medals.

FUTURE BISHOP IN THE PICTURE.

In this picture the future Bishop is included with his team mates of that great side: M. Clifford, M. Harrington, M. Bourke, T. Hayes, T. Keane, M. Hayes, P. Keane, J. Clifford, R. O'Donnell, Ned Treacy (captain), Willie Gleeson, M. O'Donnell, P. Power, M. Collins, S. Gleeson and J. Whelan.

Willie Gleeson remembers the young Patrick O'Neill in his early days at Fedamore School. He rode three miles on a little black donkey and even at a tender age gave indication of the aptitude for study, the forerunner of a brilliant academic career.

Fedamore has often been called the "Hurlers Home," and the youth of the day enjoyed a "puck about" when released from school. Crooked sticks were the usual implements they used, and young O'Neill was the envy of the entire school when he arrived one day with a beautifully shaped caman, the boss and lower portion painted blue.

THE GREAT FEDAMORE TEAM OF 1910.

These lads developed into the great Fedamore team of 1910, and Willie's abiding memory of that championship campaign is the

grand display of Patrick O'Neill as wing forward in an exciting game with Young Ireland.

Fedamore reached the County Final, in which they drew with Commercials, 2-1 all, at the Markets Field on September 9th, 1911. The re-play took place on October 29th, by which time the Maynooth students had returned to College, and Fedamore were beaten 9-2 to 3-0.

The young Fedamore lad was not long a student of St. Munchin's College when we find him figuring with them in a challenge hurling game against a very prominent City club of that period—Sarsfields—composed mainly of members of the drapery trade. The venue was a field near Ascot Terrace, and the date, Thursday, November 23rd, 1905. The result was: Sarsfields, 1-12; St. Munchin's College, 3-4.

THE TEAMS.

The teams will be recalled with interest:—

Sarsfields—J. O'Leary, M. Lynch, T. Lynch, J. Keane, J. Naughton, J. Bassett, M. Leahy, J. Kirby, P. Hayes, J. Freese, P. Liston, T. O'Donnell, J. Dwane, M. Stapleton, M. Brouder, T. Archdeacon.

St. Munchin's College—M. Fitzpatrick, P. Feely, J. Lee, T. Normoyle, P. Kearney, W. Tobin, J. Gleeson, T. Mulcahy, S. Gleeson, M. Barry, J. Dolan, J. Mortell, W. Leonard, T. Irwin, P. O'Neill.

In 1913, he was a member of the famous Maynooth College team, the Celts, who hurled many of the leading teams in the country. In the words of one of the great players of that time "they beat all before them."

When Dr. O'Neill was elevated to the See of Limerick, the people of his native parish presented him with his Episcopal Robes. In an address on the occasion of his Consecration these words are found: "We are proud of your long and intimate associations with the parish. We remember your brilliant achievements in the hurling field and in the athletic arena, deeds that might well inspire the youth of our parish to-day. We in Fedamore are proud of parish traditions."

DR. O'NEILL'S REPLY.

In the course of his reply, Dr. O'Neill said: "The ties which bind me to my beloved native parish are many and sacred. To these another is now added. I feel proud that the honour conferred on me by the Holy Father is shared by the

people and parish of Fedamore. No people and no parish could be more worthy of that honour. I pray that God may bless and protect them now and for ever."

Replying to an address from the G.A.A. on the same occasion, Dr. O'Neill said: "You are doing work for the youth which perhaps is not recognised sufficiently sometimes. By training youth to build up their bodies by the practice of athletic exercise of one kind or another, you are training their minds and souls as well. The saintly Pope Pius X said on one occasion that the athletic exercises of the body cannot fail to have a beneficial influence on the exercise of the soul."

A NOTED ATHLETE.

Dr. O'Neill, too, was a noted athlete. His peak season was 1913, when he won the 120 yards Hurdles Championship of Munster from a big entry at the Markets Field and followed this up by taking the All-Ireland title at the G.A.A. Championships held at Mallow on July 20th, his time on this occasion being 16 4/5th seconds. At the same meeting he was second in the long jump, his distance 21 feet 4 ins. Other Limerick successes at the same championships were recorded by Jim Fahey, Michael O'Brien, John O'Grady and Tim Leahy.

Dr. O'Neill later represented Limerick at the Inter County tests held at Killarney on August 14th, and again captured the 120 yards hurdles event. The well known handicapper, D. M. Power, of Ballywalter, often said afterwards that it was the greatest race over the hurdles he had witnessed in his long connection with athletics. The time was 17 seconds.

VERY KEEN ON THE VALUE OF ATHLETICS.

Dr. O'Neill was very keen on athletics, and stressed their value in some forceful addresses at County Conventions of the N.A. and C.A. To the Limerick City G.A.A. Board he presented a silver perpetual challenge cup for the development of athletics in the Primary Schools.

A life member of the Limerick City Handball Club, he was a founder member of the Canon Punch Park, heading the list with a substantial contribution.

Dr. O'Neill had another great interest as well—a love of horses, and he spent many pleasant days hunting, mainly with the Ward Hounds. A fearless horseman, he had the reputation of finishing on a few occasions alone with the hounds. On one such day he was the only member of the hunt to jump a broad river and be with the hounds to the end of the trail.

He will walk no more amongst us, but in that storehouse where we treasure the memory of those whom we have loved and lost, his name will be honoured for ever. Ar dheis an Ríogh go raibh a anam geal!