

A WEEKLY REVIEW.

AROUND & ABOUT *the* GAELIC ATHLETIC ARENA

By "VIGILANT"

"Knowledge and organisation will set Ireland free and make her prosperous."—DAVIS.*"The true test of civilisation is not the Census, nor the size of Cities nor the Crops—no, but the kind of Men a country turns out."*—EMERSON*"We cannot carry on the education of a soul and body separately—it is the whole man we have to develop."*—MONTAIGNE.

WHILE down around Waterford recently I had a few days of the often-longed-for pleasure of again walking through some of the old favourite country roads and grassy lanes which were favourite haunts in the holiday seasons of boyhood's years. I had been promising myself to renew acquaintance with these old haunts, and not even all the claims of Tramore's sunlit seascape, rocky cliffs and green-clad hills could keep me back from these old highways and byways, with all their memories of the days that are gone, the now far-scattered companions, and all the memories of happy rambles and expeditions of adventure. Cutting across from that old favourite landmark, the "Black Rock," on the Tramore road, I got sight of a little pathway through the fields over whose narrow surface many generations have found the same old "short cut." There it lay just as it did on the first day I beheld it, stretching like a brown ribbon across an emerald carpet. What memories it had for me, and what sounds of the laughter and voices of early companions it brought back to my ears. The little pathway soon led to a byroad full of gleaming blossoms and the fragrance of ripeness and rich grass browsed lazily by contented cattle, a pleasing picture with little or no changes. Coming out on to the "Cork road" just above Ballynanesagh cemetery, I looked at the old field known in other years as "The Bully Acre." The Bully Acre had always a fascination for me because of its past. I cannot claim to know it in the days of that past, for which I revere it, but I know all about it from older men who were present at the big gatherings from far and near when the "Bully Acre" was the cradle of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Waterford, and where great hurling and football matches, inter-county and inter-provincial, were decided. I could never discover why such a large tract of land, as the old field then was, should be called an "acre," or how it got the prefix "Bully." In later years I saw many fine matches played there, and it was in the tradition of things that it should be kept as Waterford's Gaelic hosting place, but it had the unfortunate disadvantage of being rather a bit distant from the city and the railway stations, but the enthusiasts of the cradle days of the G.A.A. in Waterford and the surrounding districts did not seem to mind the disadvantage of distance, and the latter days of the year 1885 and the years 1886-7-8 saw thousands of spectators at the hostings that mustered at the championship matches when the Gaelic Athletic Association was in the days of its early youth, a moulding and forceful factor for Irish Nationalism. Here is a list of some of the Waterford city and county G.A.A. clubs then playing a prominent part: Ring (Dungarvan), Butlerstown ("Tim Healys"), Rathgorman and Clonea ("Clodagh Campaigners"), Ballyduff Lower, Ballina-

melia and Aglis (Wm. O'Brien's"), Fenor, I.O.M., Ferrybank ("Thomas Sexton's"), Waterford Commercials' Hurling Club, Newtown, Co. Waterford ("Douglas Pyne Volunteers"), Nire, Ballymacarbery ("Nire Home Rulers"), Kill (Co. Waterford), Grange, Kilrossenty ("Erin's Stars"), Kilgobnet, Windgap, Waterford Thomas F. Meaghers ("The Salters"), Ballytruckle (John Mitchels), Dungarvan, Fewes, Tallow, Stradbally ("Davy Gleeson's Boys"), Waterford (William O'Brien's"), Ballinroad, Slievegua, Portlaw.

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These were the clubs that blazed the trail for Waterford in the Gaelic athletic arena before our time, and the Bully Acre was the venue where many of them played, for it was the great venue for Waterford City, and for East Waterford, and East and West often clashed in friendly but vigorous contests, and then Ballyhale, Mullinavatt, Slieverue, Mooncoin and Kilmacow, from the "Kilkenny side of the River Suir," were also there. Some of the then "live wires" of the G.A.A. in Waterford were Father Condon, C.C. (Kilmacthomas), Father Tom Hearne (Ballyduff), Dan Fraher, then the All-Ireland all-round championship holder; M. F. Sheehan, Ballyhussa; Jack Brazil, W. G. Fisher, then editor of the *Munster Express*; J. P. Kennedy, Dr. Green, Dr. O'Byrne, Tom Barry. I have no space here for the recording of names or details, but I cannot help remarking upon what history this old "Bully Acre" holds and, if it could speak, what thrilling passages from the past of the G.A.A. it might broadcast. There is also the old house in Great George's Street, Waterford, which was then in possession of the J. P. Kennedy above-mentioned. Many meetings of the old G.A.A. County Committee were held there. This reminds me of the "split" which occurred in the G.A.A. in 1887 among the leading elements, and the efforts of the politicians to "purge" it of the "extreme" or "physical force men." The "Constitutional Party" was by far the stronger party in Waterford city and county, and the Fenians made no show at the special county convention held at Kilmacthomas in December, 1887, when Father Condon was elected President, and the late C. P. Redmond, *Waterford News*, and the late Mr. T. Nolan, Ballyduff Lower, succeeded the late W. G. Fisher, *Munster Express*, as Secretaries. Father Condon, with Messrs. Fleming and C. P. Redmond, were appointed delegates to the ensuing General Convention at Thurles, and they supported the "Constitutional Party's" nominees. The Fenian element in Waterford was rather small and disorganised at the time and had in the main thrown in its lot with the Parnell movement as the result of the Devoy-Parnell compact known in history as the "New Departure." The struggle of the Irish Party and people against the Balfour Coercion Act and Landlordism, too, had aroused the

sympathy of all Nationalists and gave the Parnell movement an impetus; yet there were Fenians in Waterford who never lost sympathy with the old ideals, and they did not approve of the politicians trying to capture or scuttle the Gaelic Athletic Association, and they were in spirit on the side of P. N. Fitzgerald and his friends, and in this aspect of the early days of the G.A.A. in Waterford the old house in Waterford now in possession of Messrs. T. & H. Doolin could throw some light if it could speak. I perceived with regret that the "Bully Acre" has fallen upon evil days, for I found it proclaimed on a painted signboard as the "Waterpark College Rugby Ground," and I could not help recalling with the poet "To what base uses," etc., etc. I know Waterpark College, and it once had many hurlers and was a good centre for Gaels, but Waterpark College is like all our Seonin colleges, trotting after the Seonin ideals and would-be "classy" notions. The "classy" set that do not want to be Irish and that cannot be English, and that is like a mule buckjumping against the ways of Providence.

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I do not want to be understood as giving the impression that Gaelic games had their rise in Waterford. Gaelic pastimes, hurling, football, bowling, handball, have a long connection with the city and its environs as well as throughout the Decies generally. In tracing the history of Irish pastimes—before the inception of the Gaelic Athletic Association—in the pages of the old *Gaelic Athlete* about fifteen years ago, I showed that Waterford's connection with national pastimes was as old as Waterford itself. It was fitting that when the Gaelic Athletic Association was formed for the revival and preservation of national pastimes that Ballytruckle should be one of the first city districts to fall into line, for in days of yore Ballytruckle and its vicinity was the venue of many stirring hurling contests. It was at the place now known as Kilcohan that Thomas Francis Meagher, who had been educated in an English college, first caught a hurley and used it, and it was at a meeting in Ballytruckle during the historic Waterford Parliamentary Election of 1848, when the Young Irelanders were opposing the election of Whigs and place-hunters, that Meagher pleaded to the hurlers of Ballytruckle to preserve native pastimes and particularly the "good old muscle-making game of hurling."

I have neither time nor space now to make further reference to Waterford's past in national pastimes, and I will conclude this brief reference to that past by saying that when Ballytruckle won the Waterford County Hurling Championship in 1897, they were only proving themselves in line with the past honoured traditions of the district. (To be continued).

"Patriotism is of no one religion."—JOHN PHILPOT CURRAN.