

# THE GAELIC LEAGUE'S PLACE IN IRISH HISTORY

By Pádraig Pearse.

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I think I am right in holding that the Volunteer movement has sprung out of the language movement. It is one of a large and thriving family of youngsters of whom, whether it own them or not (and it is chary enough about owning some of them), the Gaelic League is undoubtedly the parent. The League has become a highly respectable member of society; it sits in high places and has cultured leisure. But it will be recognised in history as the most revolutionary influence that has ever come into Ireland. The Irish Revolution really began when the seven proto-Gaelic Leaguers met in O'Connell street. Their deed in 1893 made our deed of 1913 possible. The germ of all future Irish history was in that back room.

There has been a wondrous design at work in Ireland these twenty years. If it be the Almighty God that has been shaping it, then the Almighty God is very good to Ireland. Our seeming failures have not been failures, but each only the end of one phase and the beginning of a new phase, all the phases being part of one orderly progression and every one of them a necessary and inevitable part. When Parnell left, men thought that the Irish cause had come to final ruin.

But Parnell's fall (it seems a strange thing to write, but I hold it to be profoundly true) was necessary that the Gaelic League might rise. The clamour of warring factions that went up about the bier of Parnell had not died away when the clear, calm voice of the Gaelic League was heard proclaiming again the ancient truths, and reminding men that Irish nationality is an indestructible spiritual essence not dependent for its existence upon the political or other movements in which it may temporarily embody itself. After five years in the wilderness the Gaelic League for ten years had Ireland for its audience; and never did public movement rise more finely to the height of an opportunity. The fruit of that ten years' teaching and working

will last as long as Ireland lasts. Whatever happens to the Gaelic League it has left its mark upon Irish history; and the things that will be dreamt of and attempted in the new Ireland by the men and the sons of the men that went to school to the Gaelic League will be dreamt of and attempted – yea, and accomplished – just because the Gaelic League has made them possible.

For what has happened is that this aged people has renewed its youth, has drunk again at the ancient fountains, has heard again the ancient voices, has seen again the ancient visions. We are young to-day as men were young when to be a young man was to be a hero – and the one word *óg* or *óglach* covered both. We are young to-day as men were young when the boy Cuchulainn and the boy Fionn were their chosen champions; as men were young when they followed the sword of the young Red Hugh; as men were young when they thrilled to the eloquence of the young Grattan; as men were young when young Tone and young Lord Edward and young Emmet taught and led them; as men were young when young Davis and young Mitchel sang and spoke to them. We are young, and we have the wild folly and the deep wisdom of youth.

And we are about to attempt impossible things, for we know that it is only impossible things that are worth doing.

For four or five years past some of us have been expecting a birth from the Gaelic League (let no cynic say that some of us have been expecting not a birth, but berths, and got them); a birth greater and more portentous than any it had yet been delivered of. And lo, the birth is with us; the Irish Volunteers. Irish Volunteers, arms, colours and drums, they were all there in germ at the first meeting of the Gaelic League; and here they troop now clothed in flesh and blood and saluting the dawn of this year of grace 1914. Is 1914 to be the Home Rule year? I do not know, but I know, or think I know, that it is to be the Volunteer year.

It needs only that, like the Volunteers of 1778, like the Gaelic Leaguers of 1893, we rise to the height of our opportunity. Within two years the Volunteers of 1778 had won Free Trade; within four years they had won a Constitution. What might they not have won if they had not flung away their swords? The praise of the young men

who led the Volunteers of 1778 is adequately spoken when it is said that they saw what could be accomplished and then moved straight to its accomplishment. Vision to see and courage to do are the essentials of statesmanship. I think there are those among us who have the vision to see. I pray God that we may all have the courage to do.

P. H. PEARSE.