

A PLEA AND A PLAN FOR THE EXTENSION OF THE MOVEMENT TO PRESERVE AND SPREAD THE GAELIC LANGUAGE IN IRELAND.

By Eoin MacNeill.

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I.

Gaelic is now spoken by nearly, if not quite, 700,000 persons in Ireland.

The districts in which Gaelic is spoken amount to fully one-third of the area of Ireland.

It is therefore possible to preserve the Gaelic language, and if it is not preserved, the fault is ours.

II.

The number of those who speak Gaelic is diminishing at the rate of 20,000 a year!

The movement to preserve Gaelic has therefore resulted hitherto in failure.

There must, accordingly, have been some vital defect in the movement.

It is our duty to remedy that defect.

III.

The movement to preserve Gaelic in Ireland has so far confined itself almost solely to education.

No language has ever been kept alive by mere book-teaching.

Special conditions make the attempt to preserve Gaelic by book-teaching alone specially futile.

Some additional means must therefore be employed.

IV.

There is among the people a latent enthusiasm for the Gaelic language.

But their attitude to the language is effectively one of indifference.

This indifference is the chief danger to the language.

The effective indifference has a false basis; the ineffective enthusiasm has a true basis.

It should be our object to remove the indifference and to make the enthusiasm effective.

V.

The Gaelic movement in Ireland has hitherto appealed directly only to the middle classes.

The language is now in higher esteem among those classes than at any time since the 17th century.

The masses are as open to the claims of truth, and beauty, and strength, as the classes.

They have never yet been directly appealed to on behalf of the Gaelic language.

It remains to appeal directly to them.

VI.

The language cannot live at all that does not live in the homes of the people.

However important the teaching of Gaelic may be, its importance is therefore only secondary.

Our primary object should be to make the Gaelic language live in the homes of the people.

To attain this object, we must directly appeal to the common people.

VII.

Gaelic is the language of 100,000 Irish homes.

It is impossible to appeal separately to every household.

It is, therefore, necessary to address ourselves to numbers at once.

Under present conditions, large numbers will not come far to hear us.

We must, therefore, address small numbers, organizing our movement on, perhaps, a parochial basis.

VIII.

Mere addresses may not prove sufficiently attractive.

Other attractions may, therefore, be necessary.

IX.

A movement of this kind requires a number of active promoters.

It also requires funds.

To supply men and funds an organization is necessary.

X.

Such an organization would have no point of variance with any existing body.

Rather such bodies would mutually strengthen each other.

The organization would probably be centred in Dublin, but its main activity would be provincial.

XI.

Funds would come from three sources:

From members' subscriptions,

From private donations,

From the proceeds of meetings and addresses in Irish centres of population at home and abroad. (Such meetings would be distinct from those in direct furtherance of the movement. A good authority, Mr. Michael Davitt, recommended this method of procedure ten years ago.)

XII.

A concise report of *work done* would be published periodically and circulated among members, donors, persons attending meetings, and the Press.

XIII.

The foregoing details are suggestions to be criticized and improved.

They are not clauses of a bill to be taken or rejected.

A combined discussion of them at an early moment is invited, and may be arranged by those interested communicating with the writer through the Editor.

Whatever is worth doing is worth doing specially. Delay is fatal.

FINALLY.

Excepting mere working detail, all that has been urged above is matter of facts and consequences. Faults in the detail can be got over. (Criticism will be welcomed.) The facts and their consequences cannot be got over.