

THE CHURCH IN THE GAEDHEALTACHT.

By Pádraig Pearse.

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The Church, as we wrote last week, can snatch the living Irish language from death. In asking the Church to do this for Ireland, we do not ask her to step outside her function as a Church. The business of the Church is to save souls, not to save nationalities; but can she reach souls by preaching to them in a language which they do not understand? Does the Church fulfil her mission to 'teach all nations' so far, say, as Inismeadhoin is concerned, if she sends to Inismeadhoin a priest unable to speak to the people in the only language they know?

We repeat that we do not ask the Church to undertake the task of saving the Irish language. What we do ask her, or rather her ministers, is not to help in killing it. Every English sermon that is delivered to an Irish-speaking congregation drives a nail into the coffin of the Irish language. English sermons are delivered to Irish-speaking congregations in a score of countrysides every Sunday in the year. Irish sermons are the exception rather than the rule even in cases where the priest is as familiar with Irish as his flock. There is no reason why this should be so. There is every reason why it should not be so. Yet it continues.

Diocesan considerations may sometimes make it necessary for a bishop to send a non-Irish-speaking priest to an Irish-speaking district. Such a priest cannot be blamed for preaching in English, - but he can be blamed for making no attempt to learn Irish. One would imagine that his conception of duty would include perception of the fact that he is bound to set about acquiring the language of his flock. But there are priests, as there are teachers, who have lived for years in Irish-speaking parishes without making any such attempt.

Scarcely more explicable is the attitude of Irish-speaking priests who never speak Irish except when absolutely necessary. Such an attitude is far more menacing to the continuance of the language than

an attitude of open hostility. The people are quick to notice that their pastor regards the use of Irish as a disagreeable necessity, to be resorted to only when he has to deal with some doting *sean-duine* who, *an créatúir*, 'hasn't got the English.' Again, one wonders why so many priests – some of them notable League workers – continue to recite the prayers before and (more especially) after Mass in English, even though the congregation be Irish-speaking. Is there not a rubric of the Church which prescribes *the vernacular* for such prayers?

We have written fearlessly in this article. We know that we shall not be misunderstood. AN CLAUDHEAMH has more than once borne willing testimony to the fact that the clergy of the Catholic Church have given a larger, a more unselfish, and a more valuable meed of support to the language movement than any other class in the community. It was the hand of a priest that raised the banner thirteen years ago; it is the hand of some old-time fighting *sagart* of the Land War, or of some enthusiastic young fosterling of the Columban league, that keeps the banner flying on many a hillside to-day. We should not have written as we have done if we had not noted and admired the work of Gaelic League priests in Irish-speaking districts, and realised that unless their brethren in other Irish-speaking districts go and do likewise the language is doomed to die.