

WANTED – A NEW CRUSADE.

By Pádraig Pearse.

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Irish-speaking parents continue to speak English to their children less from any set design than because they have fallen into the habit of it. If you reason with them on the matter they will admit all your arguments with the greatest frankness. They will agree with you that their children ought, on national and other grounds, to know Irish; that a knowledge of Irish is not incompatible with that knowledge of English which is imagined to be so necessary for one who has to 'make his way in the world'; that the schoolmaster has better English than they (the parents) and that if the English part of the children's education is left to him it runs no possible danger of being neglected. All this will be blandly admitted by almost every Irish-speaking mother with whom you stand for a *seanchus* at a cottage door. She will even expand and illustrate the argument for you in a wealth of forcible and picturesque Irish which makes you positively envious. In the middle of the *comhrádh* Patcheen tumbles in the mud or Máirin pinches the baby. Instantly the mother – forgetting all that she has just been admitting – turns round with a 'Musha, ye have me heart broke, Patcheen!' or a 'Is it at the child y' are agin, Máirin?' We have here an amazing and an almost baffling problem in psychology. Has the woman been simply pretending to agree with you out of Irish politeness? Has she, haply, been poking fun at you? Or does English come from her lips quite undeliberately and from pure force of habit the instant she turns to address her child? The last-named seems the only tenable explanation. It has grown to be an instinct with the majority of Irish speakers to use Irish when speaking to adults and English when speaking to children. They are hardly conscious that they differentiate in the matter. They have done it all their lives. They do it now in spite of their conviction that they ought not to do it.

It is this that is killing the Irish language in its last strongholds. The custom is all but universal in the Déise. We have observed it in Baile

nan Gall. We have observed it in Baile Mhúirne, within a hundred yards of the splendid League Hall erected by An Dochtúir. We have observed it in Beal Atha an Ghaorthaigh. We have observed it in Ara na Naomh. We have observed it throughout wide stretches of Conamara, more especially North Conamara. We observed it last week in remotest Tír Chonaill. The only considerable district with which we are acquainted in which the practice has not yet gained a footing is Rós Muc.

Who will rise up to preach out the Gaedhealtacht a crusade against a habit which, if persisted in for another generation, will have annihilated the Irish language? The efforts of ten or twelve League *Timthirí* can avail but little. The work of twenty or thirty *múinteoirí taistil* scattered throughout the Irish-speaking territory will prove hardly more far-reaching. The stray holiday-making Gaelic Leaguer stopping to argue at cottage doors is sublime, heroic, but pathetically ineffective. Work in the schools scarcely reaches the parents at all. There is one influence, and one influence only – an influence always present, an influence all but omnipotent – which can substantially affect the situation: the Church.

A crusade preached for twelve months from the altars of the Irish-speaking districts would kill the habit of speaking English to children. The killing of that habit would mean the saving of the life of the Irish language. There are some who hold that it would also mean the saving of Ireland to the Church.