

THE ART REVIVAL.

By Pádraig Pearse.

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Eoin Mac Néill is one of the least communicative of men, and he has never, so far as we are aware, confided to anyone how far he anticipated such developments as—say—the National Holiday movement, or the Oireachtas Art Exhibition, or the Woollen Mill at Kilkenny, when he conceived the idea of founding the Gaelic League. The probabilities are that he never allowed his imagination to roam very far ahead; he had grasped one clear fact and he saw one clear duty,—that the National Language, the breath of the National life, was on the point of extinction, and that a might effort was needed if it was to be saved in time. So he and his fellow-workers took off their coats to the task of pioneering the language movement, feeling vaguely rather than formally holding that, the language saved, all else would come right in the end.

Later on thinkers within the League—notably An tAthair Micheál Ó hIcheadha, an tAthair Seaghán Ó Raghállaigh, and An tAthair Pádraig Mac Conshnáimha—began to develop the ‘philosophy’ of the language movement. ‘Fainne an Lae’ and afterwards AN CLAUDHEAMH SOLUIS commenced to tell the Irish public that a literary revival, an art revival, and an industrial revival would infallibly follow in the wake of the language revival. Wiseacres said: ‘We shall see.’ Well, we have seen. The literary revival has come with a rush; Irish books and Anglo-Irish books redolent, as far as Anglo-Irish books can be, of the soil of Ireland, are being poured forth from our towns and even from our country places in ever-increasing volume; the land is on fire with a sort of ‘scabies scribendi,’ the only fear of the sober onlooker being that we are *over-publishing* rather than under-publishing. The industrial revival? It is surging around us, it stares at us out of every newspaper, it parades through our streets annually on Domhnach na Gaedhilge. The art revival?—but stay, *has* the art revival come yet?

Seeking an answer to that query, we paid last week a third visit to the show of the Hibernian Academy in Abbey Street; we visited the exhibition of pictures, sketches, and crafts which half-a-dozen (mostly) young artists have brought together in Molesworth Street; we took our weekly look in at the Irish Art Companions' in Clare Street; and we marshalled our recollections of the work of Dún Emer, An Túr Gloine, and the Irish Decorative Art Association.

That there is more thought, written, and talked about art in Ireland of late than has been the case within living memory is patent. Of exhibitions the name is legion,—even Belfast is having one this week; and in Dublin 'art teas' have become an institution. But the important question for Gaelic Leaguers is how far is this obvious revival of interest in art a sane and healthy thing; how far is it due to the quickening influence of the language movement on Irish thought and imagination; and—especially—how far has the language movement actually affected artists working in Ireland so that their work commences to be an expression of Ireland—commences in short to be Irish art as the art of a Manet is French art or of a Leempoels Flemish art?

Walking through the Academy, the tangible, physical evidences that this is Ireland, as distinguished from Irelandshire, which, so to speak, strike you in the face are precisely five in number. First, there is the excellent sentiment in rather faulty Irish which is emblazoned on the frieze of the main salon. For the rest, four artists (three of whom are sculptors) give their own names, or the titles of their works, or both, in Irish. One sees 'Turning in the Cow' by Seoirse Ua Fágáin; 'Fear an Chasúir' by Joseph Hanrahan; 'Una,' a sketch model in plaster by Uilliam Mac Piarais; and 'Maire, bean Artúir Hutton,' by Miss Katheeln Shaw. Apart from these, it is all Béarla an tSasanaigh,—how different from Brussels where every inscription in the art galleries is bilingual, and from Antwerp and Bruges where, for the most part, only Flemish names and descriptions are tolerated.

But what we were in search of was rather that indefinable something about the sentiment or handling of a piece of work which would enable us to say unhesitatingly and with confidence: 'This is of Ireland;' which would enable us to recognise it as Irish if we were to

meet it in Paris or in Timbuctoo, just as one who knows anything about pictures can walk into an exhibition and pick out unerringly the French, the Spanish, the Italian, the German, the Dutch, the English pictures. What we asked ourselves was: 'Is there anything here which must infallibly have been painted or modelled by an Irishman, which none but one thinking in an Irish way could possibly have produced?'

We think we found such things. And first amongst them we would place the allegorical head in marble by Mr. Oliver Sheppard which is to form portion of the memorial to Clarence Mangan. That face is an expression of the soul of Ireland if ever the soul of Ireland has been expressed in art. One would as soon think of assigning it to an English, a French, or a Flemish chisel as to the chisel of a Chinese or a Hindoo. Only in Ireland could such a face have been seen or imagined. We must cease talking of the sculptor of this beautiful dream-face, of the exquisite 'La Jeunesse' also on show in Abbey Street, and of the masculine '98 Memorial in Wexford as 'a *clever* Irish sculptor'; he is a *great* Irish sculptor.

We seem to see (in proportion) more of Irishism in the rather meagre sculpture section than amongst the pictures. How far is this due to Mr. Sheppard's influence? We expect to find that influence—and do find it—in the work of his own pupils, three or four of whom exhibit; but it appears to extend also to such workers as Miss Kathleen Shaw, whose bust of Cardinal Logue has the dignity and simplicity of a poem in *dán díreach*.

The outstanding fact of this year's Academy, so far as the pictures are concerned, is the rise of Mr. William Orpen. We cannot call Mr. Orpen an Irish painter, but neither can we call him English. His training has been partly Irish and partly French; he works in London. We wish he would—or could afford to—make Ireland his home. Mr. J. B. Yeats is more than usually uneven this year; but his portrait of Standish O'Grady—already seen at the Oireachtas—is one of the few things in the Exhibition which haunt the memory with a sense of power. The brooding sadness of the eyes gives mute expression to a whole phase of Irish life and character. 'The Lost Land!'—in how many hearts, bold and sturdy though they normally be, has not the thought at times taken shape!

But it is not so much in the work of the better-known painters as in that of younger workers, some of them with names quite new to the public, that we believe we detect the surest signs that art in Ireland is coming to be expressive of the soul of Ireland. Scattered about the room—many of them in obscure corners—we find loving little records of Irish scenery, studies of street life in Dublin and Cork (notably ‘Cork Hill, Dublin,’ by Gerald Wakeman), Irish interiors in town and country,—all evidences that our young artists are thinking more about Ireland than formerly and looking at home more constantly for their inspiration. Amongst older painters, Mr. Kavanagh is more Irish than ever, and his eight contributions to this year’s Exhibition include three of the best things he has ever done.

The much less pretentious display in Molesworth Street has in a certain sense more of promise in it than the Academy show. Of the seven artists who exhibit one is a foreigner, though even she is as often reminiscent of Connacht fjords and Fingall roads as of the fields and villages of her own beautiful land. Of the other six, the most ambitious (Mrs. C. L. MacCarthy) seems to be a deliberate imitator of the French impressionists. The rest are Irish through and through. And the most Irish of the five is, as we might *a priori* expect, the one whose life the language movement has come most intimately,—Mrs. Elsie O’Keeffe. Her beaches at dawn and evening, her delicate recollections of beloved bays and rivers in Kerry, her hillsides and woodsides in the Dublin Mountains, above all, the delicious little miniature ‘Howth from Sandymount,’—these give the jaded frequenter of picture galleries a rare and exquisite pleasure. Next to her, and strangely akin in mood and outlook, is Miss Maud Lloyd, to whom also—as indeed to nearly all these painters—the Dublin Hills have been a veritable inspiration. Gerald Wakeman is almost purely local; he sees poetry in Ulster villages, in Dublin streets and quaysides, on the banks of canals, even on the golf-links at Dollymount. On his canvas sombre rocks, and sluggish water, and unloading coal-boats, and the bricks and mortar of dilapidated streets take on beauty.

Apart from the two exceptions hinted at, it seems to us that there is no artist here who is not looking out on Ireland and on the world with Irish eyes. And in their work as well as in a proportion of the

work at the Academy we believe we see the re-beginning of an Irish art. Others also are working who are represented neither at the Academy nor at the Leinster Lecture Hall,—sculptors, painters, book-illustrators, designers; some in Dublin, some in Belfast, some elsewhere. Yes, we think the art revival has set in.

And it will be a singularly gracious and noble revival. It will be characterised by a complete absence of what has come to be known as the ‘Celtic note,’—which is in reality an Anglo-German note. The little Exhibition at Molesworth Street suggests the points of view it will adopt, the moods it will most love. It will be an art of wind-swept heights and dark woodsides, of broad beaches and sunny meadows, of heath-scented moorlands and ferny hollows, of fireside ingles where seanchaidhes tell tales, and of cottage doorsteps where little children play. It will be an open-air art and not an esoteric thing. It will concern itself with life and not with dreams (or nightmares); with elemental impulses and not with cults. It will bear to English art and to recent Anglo-Irish art respectively the same relation that a Middle-Irish nature poem bears on the one hand to a story in the *Family Herald*, and on the other to one of the sicklier plays at the Abbey Theatre.