

THE FIRE IN THE WEST.

By Pádraig Pearse.

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The education of the Irish-speaking child is, as we wrote last week, the most sacred and important care that falls on Ireland to-day. True, our hopes of an Irish-speaking nation in this land do not entirely rest on the few score thousand children who speak Irish as their vernacular; for we believe it to be possible to impart during his school course such a knowledge of Irish to an English-speaking child as will place him for all practical purposes on an equality in the matters of *blas*, idiom, and fluency with the child whose lips have never known any language but Irish. We say 'for all practical purposes': for there will probably remain nooks and crannies of Irish thought, by-ways of Irish tradition, feeling, and imagination, which will never be trodden by any—save, perchance, by some strangely-gifted and miraculous Irish Conscience 'Hibernior Hibernicis ipsis'—who have not trodden them since first their minds began to move down the ways of thought and fancy. It is this fact that makes the Irish-speaking child so supremely important to the movement. In him the tradition of Irishism has never been snapped. We have only to educate him and we place him on an equal footing with the giants of the Gaelic past and with the mightiest of present-day Europe. We have only to educate him and we set him free to strive with the Alcuins and the Fearghals and the Ceitinns, with the Ibsens and the Tolstois and the Jokais. 'Why,' we are sometimes pettishly asked, 'has not the Irish language movement thrown up a literary figure of European importance?' There are many reasons: one, perhaps, is that the movement does not yet possess a single writer—nay, that there does not exist a single human being—who has received from the start, and in the widest and truest sense, an Irish education.

In certain lonely places of Ireland there burns—now smouldering low—a fire which, if we collect its seeds, and carefully tend and replenish it, will one day illumine the world. That fire is to be found within the ring of Ciarraidhe's hills, and by misty lake-shores

in Iar-Chonnachta, and deep in hidden glens of Tír Chonaill. It burns in the hearts of little children who prattle around their mother's knees, or, bare-footed, walk the roads to 'National' Schools or climb the mountains to herd kine and sheep. A holy fire it is and a wondrous: the holiest and the most wondrous thing in Ireland, if we except Ireland's serenity of faith and Ireland's purity of heart—to which things, indeed, this is mysteriously akin. The mightiest and cruellest civilisation in the world has for a full century exerted itself to quench that sacred flame, but without avail. Will the watchers by its hearthstone—the parent, the teacher, the priest—quench it now, or, joining in a hallowed fellowship of protection, carefully nurse and foster it until it flames up, an amazing and beautiful thing, to shine like a never-setting sun beside the Western Sea?