

# THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

By Pádraig Pearse.

From *An Claidheamh Soluis*, January 26, 1907.

We do not think we use the language of exaggeration in describing the paper which was read by Conchubhar Mac Suibhne before a meeting of Cumann na Muinteoiri, last week, as the most suggestive and stimulating address we have ever known to be delivered by an Irish primary teacher to an audience of brother teachers. Unfortunately, we have only a summarised newspaper report before us: the address in its entirety would doubtless give us even more food for comment, would doubtless open up even more numerous and more delightful avenues of thought.

In the very title of his paper, An Suibhneach summed up much that AN CLAUDHEAMH has been preaching on the education question for the past four years. If he had called it 'The Cultivation of Patriotism and the Formation of Character in a National School,' he would, to use a somewhat homely metaphor, have put the cart before the horse. In calling it, rather, 'The Formation of Character and the Cultivation of Patriotism,' he insinuated two great facts: first, that the formation of character is the primary object of education; and, secondly, that patriotism, like all great Christian and natural virtues, must rest on a basis of character. Sean Ó Caoimh was quite right in associating himself with An Suibhneach's classification. It is our strong conviction in a similar sense that has impelled the writing of certain homilies in Irish and English which have appeared in these columns during the past twelve months.

Now, the noblest of all educations is the living in intimate contact with a beautiful human life; and it is by making his own life a thing of grace and beauty that the teacher will gain the happiness of seeing successive generations of good men or women grow up around him. The teacher whose every act does not show that to him untruth and injustice, unkindness and meanness are things unholy and

abhorrent, will preach and teach in vain. As Conchubhar Mac Suibhne puts it, in terms of the primary schoolroom, 'boys are much more inclined to imitate their teacher than be advised by him, and it is quite useless to tell them that it is ungenerous and mean to ill-treat children smaller than themselves, if every day they see fellows punished and snubbed by the teacher himself.'

The two gravest faults of Irish children, as we have known them, is a certain lack of veneration for the truth, and a certain thoughtlessness in their treatment of weaker or more sensitive companions, as well as of dumb animals, often amounting to positive cruelty. We do not think that the two mighty virtues of truth and of loving-kindness are sufficiently taught either in Irish homes or in Irish schools. One might almost extend the proposition to this, that the modern Gael—and to a greater extent, of course, the modern Anglo-Gael—is largely deficient in these two noblest of the Christian virtues. If this is true, and few observers of Irish life will deny it, then the cultivation of an austere regard for the truth, and the fostering of some such all-embracing and consuming spirit of human kindness as characterised the Gael of old, should be one of the main and most sedulous cares of Irish educators.