

# LA FHEILE PÁDRAIC: NOTES AND REFLECTIONS.

By Pádraig Pearse.

From *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 14 March, 1908.

It is five years since the Gaelic League made its first great effort to secure the observation of La Fheile Padraic in a manner expressive of its significance as the national feast-day and befitting the fair and ancient fame of Ireland. To-day the Festival is so firmly established as one of the three or four central events of the year—ranking only behind Christmas and Easter as a day of religious, civic, and social solemnity—that we find it difficult to realise that its institution as a National Festival in the true sense is as recent as it is. In a few years we shall find it no easy matter to reconstitute in our mind's eye the picture of pre-Gaelic-League Ireland. The very terms adopted or invented by the League (some of them not of the happiest) have become part and parcel of the daily language even of Bearloirí,—‘Connradh na Gaedhilge,’ ‘An tOireachtas,’ ‘An Coiste Gnotha,’ ‘An Ard-Fheis,’ ‘Coiste Ceanntair,’ ‘Feis,’ ‘Cuirm Cheoil,’ ‘Seachtmhain na Gaedhilge,’ ‘La Fheile Padraic,’ ‘La Samhna,’ ‘Seachtmhain na gCrann,’ ‘Éire Og,’ and so on. It is only when one's attention is in some way drawn to the fact that the Irish public of 1908 takes the Gaelic League and all its works and pomps so much for granted that, looking back on 1898 and 1888, one realises the mightiness of the revolution that has already been accomplished. The whole national view-point has been changed. A generation has sprung up which in its opinions and ideals is as unlike the generations that immediately preceded it in Ireland, as those generations were unlike the men of the days of Keating and the Four Masters. Were a cataclysm to occur to-morrow and wipe the Gaelic League off the map of Ireland, the League's work would not wholly be lost. It has ploughed a furrow too deep to be ever effaced. It has given the nation a trend which, humanly speaking, it is bound to follow to the uttermost end of its course. We may all take consolation in the thought that, whatever happens to us or to Ireland,

the tremendous labours of the past fifteen years will never go for nought. They are embedded in the fabric of Ireland's future, whatever shape that future may take.

If La Fheile Padraic will, this year again, lack the civic dignity and eclat given to it up to 1906 by the Dublin Language Procession, it will be solemnised on its religious side more widely and more fittingly than ever. Dublin, Belfast, Cork, London, Liverpool and Glasgow, will, amid the larger cities, pay it due honour. In London, indeed, the Irish service has been temporarily ousted from Westminster Cathedral,—a topic on which it might not be wise to write all we know. The Gael, however, will feel at home in Father Moloney's old church at Dockhead. In Dublin the important parish of St. Andrew's will this year be added to those in which there will be a distinctive Irish celebration, including an Irish sermon. Maynooth will have two Irish sermons on La Fheile Padraic,—one by An tAthair Mairtin Ó Riain and one by An tAthair Conchubhar Ó Criomain. Of minor, but still important, fixtures the name is legion.

The Belfast celebration will be carried out in the shadow of the funeral pall of the good Bishop who was so closely identified with its inauguration. Irish Ireland has special reason to mourn the death of the Most Rev. Dr. Henry, so appalling in its suddenness, yet just such a death—in the very midst and heat of his work and duty—which we can imagine a zealous pastor praying for. During the last few years the dead Bishop's help to the language movement in Belfast was an invaluable factor in its progress. He was the manager of the most Irish Training College in Ireland. He was one of the two or three Bishops whose pastorals of this year had a cheering word for the work of the Gaelic League. When we quoted from it last week we little thought that we were quoting his last message to his flock and to Ireland. *Go mbadh geal í a ait is na Flaithis!*

The life of a nation is a mysterious thing, made up as it is of an endless succession of human lives, themselves ephemeral; or, rather, made up of the thoughts and ideals, the faiths and enthusiasms of which human lives are but the passing embodiments. To none of us is it given to labour longer than the little day appointed to us; yet on all of us rests how sacred a duty to preserve and hand on that little share

of the national inheritance of thought and ideal and faith and enthusiasm which has been committed to our charge! Heirs of the past, we stand in a fiduciary relation to the future. Do we realise this? The majority of Irishmen do not. The Irish speaker who brings up his children non-Irish-speaking does not. The Irish teacher who gives no impulse of Irishism to the successive generations of future citizens of his country that pass under his hand does not. The Irish priest who allows a language and a noble tradition which he might save in his parish, did he but choose, to wither before his eyes,—be assuredly does not. Looking around on this La Fheile Padraic these facts are evident to us; but there is also evident to us the no less conspicuous fact that there are parents and teachers and priests who do realise all this, and who are banded with us in this effort to save from the clutch of the *Zeitgeist* a language and a tradition—which means a nation—the disappearance of which would mark the end of the most glowing and heroic chapter in European history.