

THE FUTURE OF IRISH ART.

By Pádraig Pearse.

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We make no apology for devoting both our Irish and our English editorials this week to an event the bearing of which on our own immediate work in the language movement will be obvious to all except the superficial. We mean the inauguration of a Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in Baile Átha Cliath. Such an event is in kind as real a manifestation of the new life which is commencing to surge through the veins of Ireland as is a Feis in an Irish-speaking countryside or a new novel from the pen of An tAthair Peadar Ua Laoghaire; whilst in importance this dream come true is entitled in rank with such still unrealised aspirations as a National Academy or a National University. Ireland in our day is putting herself into communion with her own past on the one hand and with the world of contemporary imagination and endeavour on the other. The establishment of the Dublin Gallery of Modern Art marks a definite stage in the process.

‘Not by bread alone doth man live.’ Every human life has an almost physical need of a little of the sunshine which gilds the tops of the hills in Tír nan Og. So it is with a nation. The nation which casts beauty out of its house, which elects to make and do and prize only the ‘useful’ things, shall assuredly perish, and no less assuredly deserves to perish. We in Ireland once pursued the beautiful as the most worthy object of human endeavour. Our forefathers realised that the beautiful is the truly useful, and that to think a noble thought, to dream a radiant dream, to make a lovely song, to fashion a comely shape, is to do something infinitely more useful than to produce any amount of common, unlovely, unneeded ‘necessaries.’ The artist had his place, and a noble place it was, in Irish Ireland; in vulgar, squalid, out-at-elbows Anglo-Ireland there has been no room for him.

Mr. Lane¹ and the Gaelic League are allies. We are bringing back the poet and the seanchaidhe: he the sculptor and the painter. Together we are re-creating the conditions which shall make possible an era in which—to re-echo a recent writer—the phrase ‘It is beautiful’ shall be sufficient justification for any act, object, or institution you will.

To have brought a new beauty into the lives of men and women in Dublin and in Ireland would in itself have been an act as truly philanthropic, as truly *useful* in the best sense, as any act that could be planned by patriot or humanitarian; but Mr. Lane has done more. He has made it possible for young artists so to educate themselves here at home in Ireland that their message of beauty may be delivered to Irish ears in accents which they shall understand, their secrets whispered to Irish hearts in tones which shall stir their inmost chords. Hitherto the Irish-born artist has suffered under cruel disabilities: he has had perforce to go abroad young,—very often to work abroad till the end of the chapter; almost inevitably he has lost his nationality, with a large part of his individuality, and in the rare event of his achieving real distinction—obviously a difficult matter under such abnormal conditions—he has settled down in a modest niche in the Temple of Fame as an ‘English,’ a ‘French,’ or an ‘Italian’ painter or sculptor. Irish art students will still, of course, have to visit Paris and the other European art centres: but they will no longer have to seek the major part of their education abroad. Moreover, in process of time an ‘art atmosphere’ will develop in Dublin, and there will grow up in our midst a school of painters and sculptors whose work will be an authentic expression of the soul of Ireland, because it will be the creation of artists who are in a genuine sense Irish. Ireland will obviously gain, and it may be asserted with equal confidence that the world will gain also.

Thus it is that we see a national and more than a national significance in the opening of the collection which the enthusiasm and munificence of Mr. Lane, backed by the enlightened public spirit of

¹ Cartlann: Sir Hugh Percy Lane (1875-1915), established the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in 1908, the first known public modern art gallery in the world.

our Municipality, have brought together in the beautiful old house at 17 Harcourt-street. We have spoken of it as a 'dream come true.' And in truth it is difficult to realise that one is not dreaming as one passes from room to room—marshalled, too, by Irish inscriptions over each door—and sees around one the works, in some instances the masterpieces, of the most famous men in modern art. There are pictures here which will make Dublin a place of pilgrimage for everyone who loves pictures. That is very gratifying, but we are thinking rather of the effect of the collection on our own students here at home. To grow up with these Hones and Duffys and Yeats' and Osbornes and Shannons; these Constables and Watts', and Moores and Whistlers and Sargents; these Monets and Manets and Puvis de Chavannes and Courbets and Corots—not to mention the Rodins—at their very door is a privilege which was not granted to their fathers and is granted to their contemporaries nowhere else in Europe save in Paris and (to a lesser extent) in London. It is a fact for which we should all be grateful to the man whose patriotism, enthusiasm, and dauntless courage have brought it into being.