

ON TRIAL.

By Pádraig Pearse.

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During these days the men and women of Irish Ireland are on their trial. In a sense, the whole Irish public is on trial. A great crisis has arisen in the affairs of the nation, and unless that crisis be handled with tact, forbearance, but withal firmness, irreparable harm may be wrought to the nation's future. For the first time in recent history the Irish people have been given an opportunity of shaping an educational system for themselves. They have been granted an instalment of Home Rule, of Home Rule in the most important sphere,—that of education. With practical unanimity the democracy of Ireland has determined to use that instalment of Home Rule well and wisely. Seeing with a new-found vision that a system of education, to be of service to Ireland, must have as its aim the training of Irish men and women in a distinctive Irish culture and that such a culture cannot exist or be imagined apart from the distinctive Irish language, it has made up its mind that the Irish language must be part and parcel of the fundamental basis of culture which shall be adopted by the University. So far, so good.

One would have imagined that it only remained for the University authorities, supposed to represent the people and answerable in final resort to the people alone, to carry out the people's behest. But prominent men amongst the University authorities soon began to show that they were not in sympathy with the people's demands and would resist the granting of those demands to the bitter end. The situation was further complicated when the Standing Committee of the Catholic Bishops threw the great weight of its influence into the scale against the people, and when trusted popular leaders declared themselves with the Bishops and West Britain against Ireland. The delicacy of the crisis rests in this, that the people have now to wage a great fight for the maintenance of what they believe to be a vital principle against revered spiritual and political leaders whom they feel should be in the van with them and not in the

van of their enemy. While this fight must be carried on with a perfectly unrelenting determination, it must also be carried on with entire decorum, self-restraint, and good humour. The campaign must not be marred by any ebullition of temper, however natural and excusable, on our part, or by anything in the nature of bluster or swagger, masquerading as 'strength'—of which bluster and swagger are in reality the negation.

There are those who would hurry the leaders of the language movement and the responsible organs of its opinion into a position of broad hostility to the Catholic episcopacy, because the Standing Committee of the episcopacy has declared itself against us on this question, and because individual members of the episcopacy are working against us in various ways. There are those again who think that the language movement would show strength by embarking on a vendetta against Mr. John Dillon, and by driving Mr. Stephen Gwynn out of the councils of the Gaelic League. But real strength consists in proceeding calmly on your own way and with your own work no matter whosoever may seek to bar your progress. It is no part of the business of the Gaelic League to fling in the teeth of the Catholic Bishops all the blunders and alleged blunders of their body in the past history of Ireland; and it would be folly for the Gaelic League to say to everyone who cannot accompany it the whole way that he is not at liberty to accompany it, say, nine-tenths of the way. It is, however, the business of the Gaelic League to assert its own unfaltering conviction, no matter who may cherish a conviction the exact contrary; it is the business of the Gaelic League to organise and give expression to a national opinion on a question other than one of faith and morals, even though that opinion run counter to the opinion of all the Bishops; it is the business of the Gaelic League, taking the Bishops at their word that they regard this as a question for 'fair argument,' to insist that the letter and the spirit of that implied treaty be adhered to, and to give such publicity as seems necessary to acts which violate that treaty. All this the League has been doing and will continue to do; but the hopes of those are vain who think that now or any time the League will lend its countenance to an anti-clerical movement or that it can ever regard the possibility of such a movement as other than a thing

to be deprecated and dreaded no less in the special interests of the language movement than in those of the country as a whole.

This roughly is the consensus of opinion among working Gaelic Leaguers as far as we are able to interpret it. We have no fear but that the League will carry itself as becomes it during this great crisis, doing no act and saying no word which it may afterwards have reason to regret. That our allies in the press and elsewhere will maintain a similar self-possession we sincerely hope. After all, to base our plea on no higher ground, we want to win this fight,—not to make victory impossible by permanently alienating from our case men or institutions whose co-operation is necessary to our final success.