

ESSENTIALS.

By Pádraig Pearse.

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One great cardinal principle the Gaelic League has set before it. That principle is, that to preserve the National Language of Ireland is the surest and, under all the circumstances, the most practical permanent way to maintain the identity of Ireland as a Nation, to keep unbroken the line of glorious and tragic history that joins her to the past, and to set free and develop the faculties and energies of her people. That is the one essential principle of the League. With that secure all else will follow. There are many phases in the League's activities, but all are subsidiary to this. When the position of Ireland's language as her greatest heritage is once fixed, all other matters will insensibly adjust themselves. As it develops, and *because* it develops, it will carry all kindred movements with it. Irish music, Irish art, Irish dancing, Irish games and customs, Irish industries, Irish politics,—all these are worthy objects. Not one of them, however, can be said to be fundamental. And again, not one of them but receives its greatest encouragement—its very vital force—from the growth of the language. When Ireland's language is established, her own distinctive culture is assured. With a nation conscious of its own identity we need not fear questions as to what is or what is not Irish in any of these points, whether it be in music or in dancing, in fashion or in accent. All phases of a nation's life will most assuredly adjust themselves on national lines as best suited to the national character once that national character is safeguarded by its strongest bulwark. We need not fear to assimilate what is best in modern progress when our system is robust and vigorous; there will be no risk in such assimilation when our own constitution is safe; we can negotiate without suspicion when we are conscious of our strength and when our position is securely fixed above the reach of treachery or surprise or insidious attack.

To preserve and spread the language, then, is the single idea of the Gaelic League. While other causes are borne along with it as the

water-foot is carried by the current, it alone is our inspiration. And as true and simple sincerity is ever practical and straightforward, so shall we be in our efforts. We have a task before us that requires self-sacrifice and exertion as heroic as any nation ever put forth. That fact we must ever keep in mind. The surest mark of our nationality is on the point of death, and only the most supreme effort can preserve it. Woe to the unfortunate Irishman who by his lethargy, his pride, his obstinacy, or his selfish prejudice, allows the moments to pass, or impedes this national work until it is too late. It is a work that calls for the aid of all. This last chance is too precious to spare the services of a single sincere Irishman. The co-operation of every man and woman in the nation in the nation who believes in the existence of Ireland as a national entity is absolutely demanded. Any man who, while professing to support the Irish language, would for personal or extraneous reasons estrange from the movement the support of any person or class, or who would waste the strength of the movement on subsidiary or non-essential matters, must be regarded as a conscious or unconscious traitor.

The support of the whole Irish Nation, then, is essential. To win and cultivate that support and to direct it to the utmost advantage is the object of the Gaelic League's existence. To focus the strength thus gained upon the districts where the language still lives is its first duty in carrying out its working. To impress upon every Irish speaker the necessity of preserving his language and handing it down to his children; to insist firmly, uncompromisingly and continuously that all in responsible positions, whether elective or otherwise, in these districts should use the language of the people themselves and urge its use upon those who are under their influence; to secure that Irish-speaking children are taught in the language that is natural to them: these are the methods of the League in the Irish-speaking districts. To agitate unceasingly for an Irish system of education under which all Irish children shall be taught to be in every respect children of Ireland and of no other nation; to secure that teachers capable of educating such children are suitably trained; to make primary, intermediate, and university education racy of the soil; to mould and wield a united Irish public opinion strong enough to carry through these reforms: these

are the objects of the Gaelic League in education. To develop in its own ranks an army, organised, harmonious, and active, studying and propagating the language, history and customs of their own country, subordinating all considerations of self to her national welfare, and aiding in every way to build up a power that will rescue the National Language from the jaws of death: that is the mission of the Gaelic League as an organisation.