

**THE PROBLEM OF
IRISH IN THE
SCHOOLS**

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FOREWORD.

THIS paper was read in University College, Cork, on March 8th, 1936, as one of the University Extension Lectures of University College, Cork, for the 1935-36 Session. Its purpose was to remove the Irish language from the arena of party politics and newspaper controversy, and invite a dispassionate examination of the problem of making Irish speakers of all the children in the National Schools. That the conversion of our English-speaking school children into Irish speakers is a problem, nobody is now so foolish as to deny. But it is a problem which must be solved if Ireland as a distinct nation is not to die, and it cannot be solved by shirking it.

Certain aspects of the problem are discussed in the lecture, and a step towards a solution suggested. The subject, however, is far from being exhausted by this contribution. That there are other aspects of it, and other measures which are necessary to make Irish speakers of all the children, is clear from the discussion which followed the lecture. It is not a matter which can be settled by shouting, or by a show of hands, or by a counting of heads. Unless the true position of the language in the schools is known, it is not possible to assess the rate of progress with any accuracy or to assign causes or remedies for whatever failure there has been in realising the hopes expressed when the National Programme was put into operation fourteen years ago.

It is not claimed that the lecture is anything more than an honest effort to arrive at the truth on a matter of vital importance to the Irish people. As such it is offered to the public in this pamphlet in the hope that it may stimulate others to examine the problem for themselves and contribute their own share to its solution.

An Chás, 1936.

SHÁN Ó CUÍV.

THE PROBLEM OF IRISH IN THE SCHOOLS

Thirty-nine years ago, in this City of Cork, I joined the Gaelic League and entered a world of new ideas. I had been, and was still, associated with other young men who were carrying on an open movement in favour of Irish Independence. That open movement scarcely created a ripple on the placid waters of the political life of Cork. It was there, but Cork hardly knew of its existence. At the same time, unknown to the bulk of the people, there was a formidable underground movement carrying on in secret the traditions of the Fenians which the young men were trying to carry on in the open.

A meeting held in the Assembly Rooms in the South Mall to form a '98 Centenary Committee brought the two groups into contact. There was a certain amount of fusion, but no absorption, and each group continued to pursue its own course towards the goal of a free Ireland. **Political independence** was their common objective.

The feverish excitement which had followed the downfall and death of Parnell had waned, and the time was ripe for a new movement to rouse the latent national spirit of the people, a spirit which sometimes slumbers but which never dies.

The demand for financial justice for Ireland which followed the disclosures of the British Royal Commission of Inquiry into the financial relations between Great Britain and Ireland promised for a brief spell to weld all classes and creeds in Ireland into a new national movement in which the name of Irishman would be the honoured title of all citizens of this country.

Gael and Gall met in Cork Courthouse. Brave words were spoken, but when the time for action came, deeds were lacking. Once again the Anglo-Irish threw away the chance of leadership which was within their grasp. They accepted the British offer of £700,000 in relief of rates on agricultural land, and the movement which had started with such promise of a new national unity faded and soon became nothing but a memory.

It was succeeded by another movement which was destined to shift the leadership from the Gall and the English-speaking Gael to the Gael and the Irish-speaking Gall.

"Tá lámh Dé san obair seo na Gaeluinne," a deireadh An t-Athair Peadar Ó Laoghaire. Ca bhfios dúinn ná go raibh an ceart aige?

Had the financial relations movement held together, it is almost certain that the current of our national life would have continued to flow in an English channel, and that the sweet language of Ireland, the language of its youth and of its glory as an independent nation would perish as a living speech and vanish for ever from the earth.

Anybody who can recall the Ireland of 1897 will know what I mean. The Gaelic League had been in existence for four years, but it might as well have been a Yiddish league for all the influence it had had on the public life of the country. The head branch and a couple of other branches in Dublin, two branches in Cork city, a vigorous branch in London, and a few other branches in Irish towns were merely oases in a desert of anglicisation.

The Irish people as a whole knew nothing of this infant organisation which a few years later captured the imagination of young and old, and gave the nation a new weapon with which to win its freedom.

My first consciousness of this new movement was due to a lecture delivered in Cork by An t-Athair Peadar Ó Laoghaire. It was in the days of the financial relations agitation, and the title of the lecture was: "Some Losses we have Suffered." Like many others who went to the lecture, I expected to hear the case stated for financial justice for Ireland. I was soon disillusioned.

"Who steals my purse steals trash," said the lecturer; "who steals my language steals my soul," or words to that effect.

LANGUAGE AND LIBERTY.

A vision of a new world was opened up to me, a world in which I and all the people of Cork and of all Ireland would speak the language of our Gaelic ancestors, the language of my own father and mother, the language of generations of Irish people going back for two thousand years. Before the lecture I was vaguely conscious of the existence of the Irish language. When it was over I had made up my mind to join the Gaelic League and learn Irish. I joined at the next meeting of the Cork branch, and, as I have said, entered a world of new ideas. I found in

the language movement young and old who were thinking of the independence of Ireland, and who pursued their work as teachers and learners of Irish in the conscious belief that they were helping to forge a new weapon for the emancipation of the nation. **Here was a new idea: language and liberty linked together**; emancipation of the mind as a step towards emancipation of the individual, and of the nation.

The growth of the movement in the first few years was slow; after that it advanced with giant strides. The '98 Centenary celebrations, the South African War, the lecture delivered in Dublin by Father Yorke of San Francisco, and, above all, the hostility of Trinity College to the Irish language gave a great impetus to the movement. The open hostility of Trinity College to the teaching of Irish in the Intermediate schools was the first serious challenge offered to the Gaelic League. The challenge was accepted. European scholars came to the aid of our own scholars, and the enemies of the Irish language and Irish nationality were routed horse, foot and artillery.

THE NATION AT STAKE.

In the course of the fight the Irish people learned, on the authority of great foreign scholars, that in addition to being a badge of their distinct nationality, **the Irish language was a linguistic heritage of which they had reason to be proud**, and which a self-respecting nation would cherish and defend.

"I would be very sorry if the Irish language should die out, for thereby Irishmen would lose their own rationality and become Englishmen," wrote Professor Holger Peterson of Copenhagen, to the Rev. Dr. Henebry in 1899. "For as soon as the Irish language ceases to exist, there will be no Irish nation more. . . . I am a Dane, and I should be very sorry if the Irish nation that was once our teacher should cease to exist. For I am convinced that if Irishmen continue their national existence they will contribute largely to human civilisation."

And here is what the Rev. Dr. O'Hickey wrote in the *Waterford News* in September, 1899:—

"Even though half the subjects in the programme should have to be sacrificed, the language of the country should be taught in all the schools of Ireland. On this question we can have no parley; we can entertain no compromise. We have a national duty to perform, and perform it we must at any cost. The life of the nation depends upon it."

"The Gael is on his trial; if he fails he fails for ever. . . . He must prove himself worthy of his lineage by working steadily and faithfully in

this final effort to maintain a distinct Irish nation," wrote *An Claidheamh Soluis* in April, 1899.

"Gnó an Chumainn seo an Ghaedhealg do choiméad dá labhairt i n-Eirinn."

That was the first article of the Constitution of the Gaelic League, as given in the Report for the year ended 30th Sept., 1894.

"To keep the Irish language alive in Ireland," that was the aim of the Gaelic League from the day it was founded. "The preservation of Irish as the national language of Ireland, and the extension of its use as a spoken tongue." These were the words in which the object was expressed in English in the Gaelic League constitution later. But the spirit of nationality was behind these words. Ireland was calling and her children were answering the call to join on the Irish side in the battle of two civilisations, as Pádraig Mac Piarais described it.

"I don't believe," said an t-Athair Peadar Ó Laoghaire in April, 1898, "that the pecuniary aspect of the matter will weigh with the people of this country, once they realise that **the work is a national work**, and that it is being done with such energy and success as to be already assuming national proportions."

Speaking in September of the same year in Dublin in favour of the claim of the Gaelic League to the administration of the Mullen Bequest for the propagation of Irish, Father O'Leary said the record of the Gaelic League of work achieved not by money, but by heart's blood, health and self-sacrifice, showed that they could apply the Fund in the best possible way.

"Wherever the Gaelic League flourishes," wrote *An Claidheamh Soluis* in October, 1899, "it is because it has attracted the best elements of the people—men and women who have the intelligence, resolution, and energy to influence the future of the country. Should such men and women refrain from politics? Certainly not. On the contrary, they should assert themselves in every good cause—in every work that will tend to better the condition of Irishmen, and to secure their position in the hallowed land of their forefathers. We firmly believe that the sterling qualities evoked by the language movement, clearness of view, faithful co-operation, perseverance in things small as well as great, steady concentration, and the reference of all things to **one great national end**, will make their possessors in the future the leading spirits of the regeneration of Ireland. Members of the Gaelic League, stick to your work as Gaelic Leaguers.

in this spirit, and carry the same spirit into every work, public and private, social and political, to which you put your hands."

SPIRIT OF THE GAELIC LEAGUE.

History has proved the truth of that statement of *An Claidheamh Soluis*. Animated by the idea of service to the nation, through the nation's language, the Gaelic League within ten years of its foundation had become a nation-wide organisation, embracing young and old, men and women, rich and poor; an intellectual democracy in which there was something of the spirit of a true university. The teaching and learning of Irish were a labour of love, and outside the formal class-work there existed true friendship and companionship which cut across the ordinary affiliations of party and class and which in many cases survived the misunderstandings and differences of later years.

There was no slackness of conviction or defect of courage in those days. We all believed that **the Irish language could and would be saved and would become the language of the whole nation**, and we were prepared to face any risks to attain that end. Opposition spurred us on to greater efforts and to a real understanding of the merits of our own cause and of the difficulties that confronted us. The Irish people became convinced that **the interests of the Irish language and the interests of education were identical**.

It was a hard fight to get those in authority in Dublin to agree with the Gaelic League that the home language of the children should be the medium of instruction in the Irish-speaking districts; in fact it was an English minister, James Bryce, Chief Secretary for Ireland, who put that principle into operation, and Irish administrators did their utmost to thwart the Gaelic League in its efforts to secure the complete working out of that principle in the schools of the Irish-speaking districts. They allowed Irish to be used as the medium of instruction in the lower standards, but **insisted on the teaching of English from the first day the child entered school**, and the teaching of subjects through English as soon as the children's knowledge of that language enabled them to receive the instruction in it.

The administrators in Dublin persisted in their own interpretation of the bilingual programme, although a special Ard-Fheis of the Gaelic League in 1908 demanded **unilingual education**

for the *Gaeltacht*, to preserve the vernacular areas as the pure fountains of living Irish speech.

It would not be easy to get an example of such a complete change of policy as has taken place in Ireland on this question. Not only is there no opposition now to unilingual education in Irish in the *Gaeltacht*, but **the use of Irish as the medium of instruction in all national schools** in Saorstát Eireann is now and has been for the past ten years the accepted policy of all sections of the population. The aim of the National Programme as explained in the report of the National Programme Conference of 1925 is

to secure the full use of Irish as the teaching medium in all schools as soon as possible.

The names of the members of the Conference show that the complete Gaelicisation of primary education has the support of all those connected with the administration of National Education including both Catholic and Protestant managers, teachers and the Central Educational Authority (Appendix I.). There may be difference of opinion as to the best methods to be pursued to reach that objective, but the objective itself has never been challenged by anybody who stands for the revival of the national language.

TEACHING THROUGH IRISH.

Those who say that only the home language of the children should be used as the medium of instruction are laying down an entirely new principle in education. In Ireland and in other countries children have acquired a new language and received instruction in other subjects through the new language. There are so many examples of the successful use of a second language as a teaching medium that the enunciation of the new principle must be due to the confusion of methods with principles on the part of those who advocate it.

The Department of Education has pointed out that **much harm has been done by attempts to teach subjects through the medium of Irish** where the children did not know Irish well enough to receive instruction in it, or the teachers were not fully qualified to impart instruction in Irish (App. 2). The remedy for this state of affairs is not to lay down a false principle, but to make sure that the two essential conditions required by the Department exist.

Irish can not be taught through the medium of algebra, but algebra can certainly be taught through the medium of Irish when the children and teachers know the language.

And, as the Department of Education has pointed out in its circular to the schools :

"Teaching through Irish is not obligatory unless the teacher is competent to give the instruction and the pupils are able to assimilate the instruction so given."

Many workers in the language movement resent recent criticism of the policy of teaching school subjects through the medium of Irish. They regard some at least of that criticism as part of a campaign against the primary object of the Gaelic League : "The preservation of Irish as the national language of Ireland and the extension of its use as a spoken tongue." Their suspicions may not be well founded, but their judgment is not at fault when they see in criticism of the use of Irish as a teaching medium an attack on the very foundations of the language movement.

The schools alone cannot save the language. Their efforts must be sustained by the use of Irish in the public life of the country and by a movement among the adult population to make Irish speakers of the men and women of to-day. Until Irish is used as a living language, both inside and outside the schools, its continued existence will be in danger even though everybody has learnt it. It is not enough that a language be known ; if it is not spoken it is dead.

There must be at least twenty thousand adults in Dublin who can speak Irish, but for most of them English is the language of their daily lives. In some Government offices and in certain schools, Irish is used as the normal medium of communication. Everywhere else English is the language of life and intercourse.

It will take a long time to secure the use of Irish as the ordinary medium of intercourse in the highly complex life of a city like Dublin. That, however, is the objective of the language movement, and the daily use of Irish in the simpler forms of life is the first step in the attainment of that objective. **We must begin with the Gaelicisation of the Schools**, so that Irish will become part of the daily life of the children and will not be regarded by them as something like algebra or arithmetic to be learnt for the purpose of getting marks at some examination, or

as an accomplishment for use on special occasions like meetings of the Fáinne or the Gaelic League.

IRISH AS A SUBJECT.

The children love Irish when the teaching of it is made attractive. They take to it naturally, because most of them have inherited Irish currents of thought from their immediate ancestors, and many of them are only a generation or two removed from Irish speech. Their English is not the English of England. It is a language which includes many of the moulds of Irish speech as well as Irish sounds, and the scientific teaching of it is not only **a splendid intellectual training for the children**, but a help to them in the better understanding and appreciation of real English.

It goes without saying that the proper teaching of Irish as a subject should not be neglected. It should in fact be given primary place in the work of the schools. But when the language is properly taught and the children know it, the explanation of other subjects through the new medium tends to clarify the meaning and give the children a better grasp of the subject.

On educational as well as on national grounds, therefore, the use of Irish as a teaching medium is sound policy. On the other hand the forcing of the use of Irish as a teaching medium where the conditions laid down by the Department of Education are absent is a negation of education.

The nation is committed to the proper teaching of Irish as a living language and to the Gaelicisation of primary education. That is the problem of Irish in the schools. **How is it possible "to secure the full use of Irish as the teaching medium in all the schools?"** It is, perhaps, easier to say how it could be prevented than how it could be secured.

It could be prevented by antagonising the teachers, on whose enthusiasm and whole-hearted endeavour the success of the effort depends; it could be secured by friendly co-operation between the central administration and the teachers as partners in a great national enterprise. It is a gigantic task which cannot be accomplished without mutual goodwill on the part of administrators and teachers, a fact which the Minister for Education recognised when in April, 1934, he invited the teachers to con-

sider in the light of their own experiences the best means of promoting the study and use of Irish in the schools. (App. 3).

PROGRESS TOO SLOW.

How far are we progressing in the solution of the problem? When we think of the progress that was made in the learning and speaking of Irish in the teeth of the opposition of those in charge of education in Ireland in the past, many of us get **impatient at the slow rate at which Gaelicisation has been taking place**, and ask ourselves: "Is this tacit acceptance of the Gaelicisation of the schools any more than the sinner's acceptance of the Ten Commandments?" In 1934 there were 386 schools in which all subjects were taught through Irish. A footnote to the Report of the Department of Education points out that that was an increase of 69 per cent. as compared with 1931. Put that way, the increase looks impressive, but in relation to the total number of schools the number is discouraging to all who wish to see Irish become the language of the country again.

Here are the figures from the Reports of the Department of Education:—

SCHOOLS IN WHICH ALL SUBJECTS ARE TAUGHT THROUGH IRISH.

	1931		1934
Gaeltacht	175	out of 422	201
Breac-Ghaeltacht	8	" " 756	53
Galltacht	45	" " 4,200	132
Totals	228		386

At this rate how long will it take to Gaelicise the schools of the Gaeltacht and Breac-Ghaeltacht, not to mention the Gaelicisation of all the schools in the Saorstát?

Even in the teaching of Irish as a subject is there any real friend of the language who is satisfied with the rate at which Irish speakers are being made in the schools?

The Report of the Department of Education for the school year 1924-5 states:—

"The first real step towards the placing of the Irish Language on a proper basis in the schools was initiated by the enactment of the Provisional Government on the 1st February, 1922, that on and after the 17th March, 1922, the Irish language should be taught or used as a medium of instruction for not less than one full hour a day within the ordinary school hours in every school in which the staff, or any member of the

staff, was competent to give such instruction. As a result of that step, **Irish is now not only a subject in all schools, but a medium of instruction in an increasing number.** In Infant schools and in Infants departments, Irish alone is being used in the instruction where the teachers are sufficiently qualified."

How were the hopes expressed in that Report fulfilled? Six years later the Department stated in the Report for the year 1930-31 :—

" There is a **general note of disappointment in the Inspectors' reports** with regard to the work of the schools in making Irish speakers of the pupils. If the majority of our pupils do not acquire a reasonable facility in expressing their ordinary ideas in Irish before they leave school, and if they are not imbued with a love for the language, that will urge them to employ it in daily use and to seek opportunities after leaving school of improving their command of it, we shall make little progress in getting nearer the goal of an Irish-speaking Ireland, and our efforts in the schools will be almost fruitless. . . . **Sometimes the learning of Irish is nothing more than aimless drudgery.** Such teaching will not produce Irish speakers nor realise in any degree the aims of the programme. . . . In general, the schools, however excellent the teachers may be—can only attain a limited success if they are not aided and encouraged by outside forces, by the Church, the Press and public opinion."

The Report states that in the Gaeltacht, up to 50 per cent. of the pupils were still being taught either wholly or partly through English in the standards above the Infants' classes. We have seen how slight the improvement was for 1933-34. Referring to the efficiency of the teaching of the language itself, the Report for that year states :—

Múintear go réasúnta maith í mar adhbhar sgoile, agus tugtar aire mar is cóir don chomhrádh, don léightheoireacht, don aithriseoireacht, and don ghramadaigh, **ach is beag sgoil sa nGalltacht gur féidir a rádh go bhfuiltear ag déanamh cainteoiri de na Dáltaí.** Deirtear gur fearr an obair atá á dhéanamh ins na bunranga ná ins na hárd ranga i mBaile Átha Cliath agus i n-áiteanna eile; ach ar an dtaobh eile, deir cuid de na ci irí **gur suarach an méad Gaedhíle a bhíos ag na Páistí ag dul isteach san gCéad rang doibh tar éis dhá bhliain a chaitheamh i rang na naoinean.** I bhfósgoil thall is a bhfus tá sár obair á dhéanamh ag a hoidí agus is ceart moladh fá leith a thabhairt dóibh."

At a meeting of Technical School Teachers held in Dublin on January 19th, 1935, Mr. George Clampett, Principal of Rathmines Technical Institute stated that out of 350 or 370 day students from 14 to 18 years of age, they could not get one group of 20 capable of taking instruction entirely through Irish. The

result was that they were unable to give instruction entirely through Irish.

" An Buachaillín Buidhe " stated that although he had been teaching for many years he was unable to teach through Irish because the students did not know Irish.

Miss H. Moloney said she was dealing with a large number of pupils up to 14 years of age, and they were unable to pronounce even a name in Irish.

THE LEARNING OF IRISH BY ADULTS.

Small indeed is the comfort to be derived from these official and unofficial reports. But we need not be unduly discouraged. If there are any friends of Irish who feel despondent, or enemies who feel elated, at the relatively slow progress in the Gaelicisation of the country which these reports indicate, I would remind them both of **the extraordinary number of adult learners who became good Irish speakers in the early days of the Gaelic League** when the forces of the State were hostile to the language, and the equipment and facilities for learning it were nothing like what they are to-day. What they accomplished under difficulties and discouragement should certainly be possible to all the youth of the Saorstát now and to a great number of adults also.

The learning of Irish by adults has been made easier by the provision of text books compiled on scientific principles, by gramophone records and radio talks and plays, by the increasing use of Irish on stage and platform, and by the facilities afforded for practice in the use of the language at summer courses in the Irish-speaking districts. These facilities are in fact reawakening the enthusiasm which enabled so many adults to surmount difficulties in the past.

Enthusiasm without facilities can accomplish more than facilities without enthusiasm, but a combination of both ensures success.

The preservation of the Gaeltacht is a first essential for the continued existence of Irish as a living speech. Many things are needed to convince the people of the Gaeltacht of the value of Irish. Not the least of these is the example afforded by the adult population living outside the narrow area of the Irish-speaking districts. As long as English continues to be the sole language of life outside the Gaeltacht, it is too much to expect

the Irish speakers to appreciate the value of the linguistic heritage which they enjoy.

The learning and use of Irish by adults is of great importance, if for that reason alone, but in the circumstances of the present time our main reliance must be on the youth, and it is far from encouraging to learn from the latest report of the Department of Education

gur beag scoil sa nGalltacht gur féidir a rádh go bhfuiltear ag déanamh cainnteoirí de na daltaí.

If, after ten or twelve years of intensive work in the schools, the Department of Education finds it necessary to report that few schools in the Galltacht are making Irish speakers of the pupils there must be something fundamentally wrong in the methods in operation in the schools. Otherwise such meagre results could not be obtained from the lavish expenditure of money and energy on this work since 1922. I would appeal to all to approach the problem in the spirit of the pioneer days of the Gaelic League, to ignore prejudices and vested interests, and seek the causes of failure and remove them so that this great national effort may not fail. With a great popular movement outside the schools supporting the work of the schools **it should be possible without drudgery for teachers or pupils to ensure that all the children in all the schools will become good Irish speakers.** Yet failure is reported.

CAUSES OF FAILURE.

From a study of regulations, programmes, reports, methods of teaching and examination, and from an investigation of actual work in Dublin schools, I am satisfied that the failure can be traced to many causes. For example, the importance of written work is over-stressed, while "gross slovenliness" in speech "is allowed to pass unnoticed or unchecked," because the value of phonetics in the teaching of a new language is not recognised. "At present the work is too casual," says "Notes for Teachers." "There is too much dependence on the purely imitative powers of the children unaided by special drill and too much mere correction of errors that leaves the fundamental trouble untouched."

There are many other causes of a technical nature, but **one great cause of the failure to make Irish speakers of the pupils is**

the exclusion of English from the infants' classes in the English-speaking districts. This is evident from the latest Report of the Department of Education which says that some of the inspectors state that after spending two years in the infants' classes the amount of Irish known by the children on entering the first standard is trivial. Many teachers go much further and say that not only do the pupils coming up from the infants' classes not know Irish, but that the repression of their natural impulse to speak during the period spent in the infants' classes and the use of an unknown language as the sole medium of instruction has retarded their mental development, and impaired their power of expression and their ability to learn anything. I found this opinion general in Dublin in 1933, when with a foreign friend who was interested in the subject I visited a number of schools in the city.

That the results have not been even more serious is due to the fact that the regulation excluding English from the schools has not been strictly enforced. Religious instruction is given in English, and English has also been used in secular instruction when the eye of the inspector was not on the teacher. This surreptitious use of English, however, while it mitigated the evil results of the system, was not a proper or adequate means of training the children's minds, and it was **a lesson in deceit** in so far as it was done in defiance of the regulations and of the inspectors, whose duty it was to see that the regulations were carried out.

There are some who say that English was rammed down the throats of the Irish people in the past, and that Irish should be rammed down their throats now. That, of course, is psychologically and historically untrue. **A language cannot be rammed down people's throats.** Forcible feeding in a physical sense is a dangerous experiment, as we know only too well. Forcible feeding of the mind is no less dangerous.

A BARBAROUS METHOD.

When this barbarous method was practised by the English in the schools in the Irish-speaking districts, it was rightly denounced by Irish educationists and by all advocates of the Irish language.

"To ignore and neglect a language known to the pupil, in

educating him, is a radical and elementary educational blunder," wrote *An Claidheamh Soluis* in 1899 in an editorial entitled "The Educational Crime."

Paraphrasing evidence of Mr. Edwards, British Inspector of Schools, in regard to education in Wales before the home language was allowed as a medium of instruction *An Claidheamh Soluis* in another article said:—

"A policy which gags the mouth of the child, stupidly ignores the habits and associations of the home, and crushes every native sensibility. It can only result in immense waste of energy, in the lowering of the tone of the nation, and in a paralysis of the intelligence of many generations of Irishmen."

The Rev. Dr. O'Hickey, one of the most active propagandists for the language in the early days of the Gaelic League, carried on a campaign throughout the country against the educational crime of denying children instruction in their home language. Speaking at Newry on October 30th, 1899, he said:—

"It is a fundamental principle, a perfectly obvious axiom of education that it should proceed from the known to the unknown; but in Irish education who troubles his head about axioms! The children are stupefied; they lose all their buoyancy and vivacity. They become utter dolts. They learn nothing whatever satisfactorily; and how on earth could they be expected to do so? The outcome is intellectual paralysis, utter mental annihilation, and, for two or three generations, something far worse, more deplorable, more degrading than mere ignorance. . . . Of course **the children in the Irish-speaking districts should have been taught their native language in the first instance.**"

Referring to the exclusion of the home language of the pupils from the schools in the Irish-speaking districts, Dr. O'Hickey said:—

"The system of education obtaining in the schools of these districts is an outrage upon humanity and common-sense, **an educational crime of the darkest dye.** . . . The children speak the language . . . before they come to school in the morning and after they have returned from school in the evening; on their way to and from school, morning and evening; in the playground during their hours of recreation; on Saturdays and Sundays when school does not assemble; during their vacation when school work is suspended. **Yet when they are at school all the work of the day is done in English.**"

In an Editorial on Dr. O'Hickey's Newry address, *An Claidheamh Soluis* demanded that wherever Irish was the home language of the pupils it should be taught and used as the medium

of instruction, and that where Irish was not the home language all restrictions on the teaching of it should be removed, that teachers should be free to teach it as part of the ordinary programme, and to teach it at the earliest stage at which pupils were capable of learning it.

"To ignore it (the home language), to put it one side, and to use an unfamiliar language in its place, is a crime against reason. That policy has been abandoned in Wales, ruled over by the English Council of Education. We have lately seen that even the despotic Czar is abandoning it in down-trodden Poland. How much longer shall we tolerate it?" asks *An Claidheamh Soluis.*"

These quotations are typical of the opinions of all friends of the Irish language at that time. **Nobody denied that it was an injustice to exclude the home language of the children from the schools.** Those in authority simply ignored the protests of the Gaelic League until they were compelled to take notice of them. They had this excuse for the torture they inflicted on the little ones that, unlike the majority of the parents and children in the English-speaking districts to-day, parents and children in the Gaeltacht in those days were eager to acquire the new language as a passport to advancement in life. It was a barbarous thing to exclude the Irish language from the schools of the Irish-speaking districts, but this at least could be said for the Tyrone House torturers of the children, that all the teachers could speak the new language as a vernacular tongue and that the new language was the language of Church and State in Ireland and in the countries to which the boys and girls of the Gaeltacht emigrated. How different from the position of Irish in the English-speaking districts to-day!

VITAL FACTORS FORGOTTEN.

Why, it may be asked, in the face of the policy of the Gaelic League in the past was the old policy of the National Board of excluding the home language from the schools adopted when we got control of our own education? It is hard to say. There may have been some who thought that the ramming process would succeed. There were others who believed that by excluding the home language from the infants' classes the infants would become Irish speakers. Experience has shown that they were mistaken in their belief. **They left out of consideration many vital factors in the lives of the children.**

If children of four to eight years of age could be completely isolated from their home language and brought up in the environment of another language, they would no doubt acquire the new language, and even forget their own. The success of the Ring Fosterage School and of certain all-Gaelic schools in the Galltacht in making Irish speakers of children of 7 to 14 years of age shows what can be done in special circumstances with comparatively small groups of pupils. More Fosterage Schools and more all-Gaelic primary schools are needed, but while they will do valuable work in a limited sphere, **they will leave the main problem unsolved**, the problem of making Irish speakers of all the children in all the schools.

A National Teacher who is a member of the Coiste Gnótha of the Gaelic League, wrote recently that he was not interested in the creation of a privileged class of Irish speakers among the children of the well-to-do whose parents can afford to send them to special schools. He wanted equal opportunities for all children. For the overwhelming majority of the children of Dublin, Cork and other English-speaking areas there is no possibility of securing equality of opportunity in the sense of these children being enabled to attend specialised courses in fosterage schools or other special schools. Their circumstances do not permit of it. **For them there is no hope except the Gaelicisation of the schools which they normally attend.**

Isolation from English outside school is impossible for them. In school, English-speaking infants who never hear a word of Irish outside school hours are cooped together in classes of 40, 50, 60, and even 70 pupils each, and their teachers are forbidden to speak English to them. According to the Report of the Department of Education, there were 130,925 infants on the rolls on the 30th June, 1934, and of these 17,997 were in the city of Dublin, where there were **69 classes with between 50 and 60 pupils each, and 109 classes with over 60 pupils each.**

Nearly one seventh of all the children on the rolls of the National Schools are in the city of Dublin. The solution of the problem of teaching Irish to the infants in these schools may afford the key to the solution of the whole problem of the Gaelicisation of primary education. If there is anybody who believes that the ramming process was successful in the past, I would refer him to the reports of the inspectors published

by the Commissioners of National Education, both while that barbarous method was practised and after it was abandoned. (App. 4). These reports show that **the Anglicisation of the children of the Gaeltacht went on much more rapidly when the use of the home language as a teaching medium was eventually permitted.** The National Board saw to it that while instruction might be given in the Irish language where Irish was the home language of the majority of the children, English should be systematically taught as a subject to all children from the day they entered school, so that when they advanced in knowledge of the new language, instruction would be given in that language in increasing extent from year to year.

SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM.

In Wales and in Gibraltar also the English abandoned the ramming process and allowed the home language of the children to be used as the medium of instruction. The Welsh, having won their fight for justice for the Welsh-speaking children, have prevented the reform from being used to spread English in the Welsh-speaking districts. They are constantly devising means to strengthen the native language, and to-day their language is stronger than it has been for generations.

In the lower grades in the primary schools in Gibraltar Spanish is now used for the purpose of explanation, but even in Standards 1 and 2 children are taught to read and recite in English. **From Standard III. upwards, English is the medium of instruction.** When the children come to the secondary schools they know English well enough to receive all or nearly all the instruction in that language.

The methods practised by the English in Welsh-speaking Wales, in the Gaeltacht of Ireland, and in Gibraltar and afterwards abandoned, were also tried and abandoned by the Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies. Here is what a Catholic teacher in the Netherlands East Indies says :—

“According to that method (the method of excluding the home language of the children from the school) the Javanese children were placed in a Western milieu, which may safely be said to be contrary to all psychological principles. A method should be adapted to the surroundings in which the child lives. As moreover, the children learned a good deal of book-language and cliché-language by this method, it was to be expected that as new ideas were gaining ground a reaction would come in

due time. The Government have since brought about some radical changes. The idea of the government seems to be **no Dutch during the first three years except as a subject.**"

The writer explains that after that Dutch becomes the teaching medium, but the native language continues to be taught as a subject. A report from the Colonial Office at the Hague gives similar information.

Do not all these examples suggest a solution of the problem of the Gaelicisation of the schools, and **a solution which harmonises the interests of the Irish language with those of true education?** If the home language of the children were used as the medium of instruction in the infants' classes in Dublin, and the rest of the English-speaking area, and if Irish were properly taught to them as a subject in these classes, similar results to those obtained in Wales, in the Gaeltacht, in Gibraltar and in the Netherlands East Indies might be expected and the Gaelicisation of primary education assured.

The children, as I have said, love Irish when the learning of it is made attractive, and, with a rational system of teaching and a properly graduated programme in Irish as a subject, **there is no reason why every child in every National School should not become a good Irish speaker.** At present, as the Report of the Department of Education tells us, only a small percentage of them really acquire a good speaking knowledge of the language. And many of them get a distaste for it which may prove one of the greatest obstacles to the realisation of an Irish-speaking Ireland. We must see that this is changed or our work will be in vain.

APPENDIX I.

SIGNATORIES TO THE REPORT OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAMME CONFERENCE.

Chairman—Reverend Lambert A. J. McKenna, S.J., M.A., M.Litt.Celt., Higher Diploma in Education.

Representing School Managers :—

Right Reverend Thomas F. Macken, P.P., V.G., Dean of Tuam.
Very Reverend J. Canon Waters, P.P., and Reverend Canon Kingsmill Moore, D.D.

Representing Teachers in National Schools :—

Cornelius P. Murphy, President of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

T. J. O'Connell, T.D., General Secretary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

Eamonn Mansfield, D. F. Courell, Members of the Central Executive Committee of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

Representing the General Council of County Councils :—

Senator Patrick William Kenny; P. O'Siochfhradha (An Seabhadh).

Representing the Gaelic League :—

Cormac Breathnach; Caitlin nic Gabhann.

Nominated by the Minister for Education :—

General Mulcahy, T.D.; Professor W. Magennis, M.A., B.L., T.D.; Professor W. E. Thrift, M.A., F.T.C.D., T.D.; Patrick F. Baxter, T.D.; Senator E. MacLysaght; Senator Thomas Farren; Miss Louise Gavan Duffy, M.A.; Reverend Brother Kelleher; General-Inspector Seoirse MacNiocaill, M.A.; Divisional-Inspector M. Franklin, B.A.; Divisional Inspector Henry Morris.

APPENDIX II.

NOTES FOR TEACHERS, page 54 :—

"Much harm has undoubtedly been done and much disappointment created by beginning instruction through Irish before either teacher or pupils were sufficiently advanced in the language to enable that instruction to be given with profit. Until reasonable fluency and accuracy of speech are attained in spoken Irish; until the lesson in the new subject is in no danger of becoming suddenly a lesson on Irish, it is not advisable that the attempt be made."

NOTES FOR TEACHERS, Page 31 :—

"The teaching of Irish in the schools is a part—a very important part—of the general effort to restore the Irish language to its rightful place as the every day speech of the nation. Its aim is frankly and unequivocally to make Irish speakers of the children of the Gaeltacht, so that, by the age of 14, they may be able to express themselves freely, fully, and correctly in the new language. In the Gaeltacht its aim is to perfect the vernacular into as adequate an instrument for all forms of self expression as the higher English course aims at doing for English-speaking children."

APPENDIX III.

EXTRACT STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION.

(*Dail Eireann, 11th April, 1934.*)

MR. DERRIG : " I am not of course satisfied that we have always approached this question of bringing a new language into the schools, as a new language it undoubtedly was, from as purely a scientific standpoint as we should have done. I would be very glad indeed if from time to time our inspectors and teachers could come together, or our teachers themselves could come together, apart from the inspectors, if they so wished, to discuss these problems ; to see whether for example, the question of having only Irish in the infants' school from the first day that the child comes to the school is the most successful method, or whether a little English should be allowed for a while until the child becomes accustomed to the new atmosphere. . . . The only way in which we can test whether the complete Gaelicisation of the infant schools and the infants' departments as the first step—whether that is or is not the most satisfactory and most efficient way to carry out our purpose, we can only find out, I think, by trial and error. But, as I said, I should certainly like to see more experiments, particularly in our larger schools, because the public do not realise the good work that certainly is being done in some schools, and in order to give educationists this encouragement, to show them where the work is being done so that they can go and see for themselves, and when teachers' congresses come together we might occasionally have papers and discussions on topics of this nature."

APPENDIX IV.

J. P. DALTON, M.A., Divisional Inspector, Galway, in 1906 Report :—

" By patient and unremitting iteration, continued day after day, the infant pupils are brought in the course of a year or two to associate a vague meaning of their own with the easier English vocables. But, until they reach the second standard, the language of the teacher is scarcely more to them than a jumble of undistinguishable sounds. At the end of their brief school course, English is still to them but an unhandy and unready weapon, and when they pass from the school to the life and work of their homes, they fling the weapon altogether away."

D. MANGAN, Irish Inspector, in 1909-10 Report :—

" All who have favoured me with their view on the question (the use of Irish as a teaching medium in the lower standards in the Gaeltacht) are unanimous in the opinion that the introduction of the bilingual system is a great boon for the children in the Irish-speaking districts."

Here is what another Inspector wrote in 1909 :—

" The introduction of the programme into these schools has been most beneficial. The Irish children especially who came to school ignorant of English, are making much more rapid progress in both Irish and English. I have been particularly struck by the alertness and earnestness of these children. . . . Heretofore the children after leaving these schools became Irish speakers. They almost invariably forgot whatever English they had learnt at school. Now they will read and write English well, and they will also read and write Irish."

Other Inspectors stated that the bilingual programme succeeded in Anglicising the Gaeltacht more rapidly than all-English unilingual programme did.