

**LECTURES ON THE IRISH  
LANGUAGE MOVEMENT  
DELIVERED UNDER THE AUSPICES  
OF VARIOUS BRANCHES OF THE  
GAELIC LEAGUE**

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Lectures on the Irish language movement delivered under the auspices of various branches of the Gaelic League by P. S. Dinneen

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**P. S. DINNEEN**

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**LECTURES**  
ON THE  
**IRISH LANGUAGE MOVEMENT**

DELIVERED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF VARIOUS BRANCHES OF THE

**GAELIC LEAGUE**

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER,

BY THE

**REV. P. S. DINNEEN, M.A.**

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## PREFACE.

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THE Committee of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League are glad to announce that they have prevailed upon Father Dinneen, President of the Branch, to allow his Lectures on the Irish Language to be published in book-form with an Introductory Chapter. Although accurate condensed reports of the Lectures here given appeared in the *Freeman's Journal*, and were copied into some of the provincial and foreign press, nevertheless their publication at this date will give fresh emphasis to the arguments for preserving Irish as a vernacular speech which they contain. The circumstance that they were delivered before popular audiences, and prepared while work of an entirely different character was pressing heavily on the author, made him reluctant to publish them in a collected form. With the exception of a short address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Keating Branch in April, 1903, and an address before the O'Growney Branch in February of the present year, only set lectures are included in this collection.



## I.—INTRODUCTORY.

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THE Irish Language Revival movement is attracting a good deal of attention of late. The main plank in the platform of the movement is the Irish language in some form or other, but with the cultivation of the language there is associated an effort to revive Irish games and pastimes, Irish manners and customs, as well as Irish industries. The language is the root on which all the other elements are grafted, and it is the language in its living state, and not the language as found in books and manuscripts, that is the true basis of this general national revival. If the Irish Language were to become extinct as a living speech, as, say, Cornish is extinct, even though it should be studied in every school in Ireland, it could not be taken as the basis of a national regeneration. It is the living word, and the living word alone, that possesses the spell that is powerful enough to call back the nation as a whole from the degrading life of foreign imitation, and give it strength and nerve to develop a native civilization. For this object, it is not necessary that the language should be vernacular throughout the entire country. It is sufficient that it exist in a flourishing condition as a real vernacular, that it have every facility for growth and extension, and that it be studied everywhere, and be held in high esteem in the schools and councils of the land. It is impossible, however, for the language to exist and thrive at the present time without growth and extension. It must be made the vehicle of education, it must be used for all the purposes of civilized life, it must be cultivated to the point of spontaneous literary expression, it must produce a literature that will be able to hold its own against contemporary English literature. To produce such a literature, an audience of Irish readers must be created sufficient to ensure a reasonable circulation for Irish books and newspapers and magazines, and the Irish-reading public must be of sufficiently wide range to insure a healthy diversity to the literary output.

In an age like the present, it is no easy thing to maintain a cultivated living speech in such a state of vitality that it can hold its own against the living, highly cultivated languages of the great modern nations. Irish has, indeed, several advantages over English. It has lain long dormant, and has

never been spoiled by excessive printing. Its lack of scientific terminology, though a serious shortcoming, from the utilitarian point of view, renders it more suitable as a vehicle of pure literature. Its study is interesting to the antiquarian and comparative philologist, and it has preserved its identity more completely than perhaps any other European language. It is even at the present day a strongly inflected language and its grammatical structure is so precise and so unlike that of most other modern languages, that its study may become an important element in a liberal education. It is so closely bound up with our historical documents, and with the very topography of the country that a knowledge of it is indispensable for even an elementary study of our history. It is, no doubt, deficient in literature of general interest, and this deficiency must continue for a long time.

It should be borne in mind that Irish can fulfil important functions as a national language without becoming vernacular over the entire island, or even over half the island, provided it be cultivated with care in those districts in which it is living, and be studied as well as is possible in the other parts of the country, and there can be no question that its existence as a flourishing vernacular in the country must produce a profound effect on the character of the entire people, and be no inconsiderable force in shaping the destinies of the nation. It will serve to give future generations a love for their country, considered as a distinct historic nation, and will stimulate them to work with enthusiasm for her welfare and her glory. It will serve to distinguish the Irish people abroad from those of other nationalities, and thus strengthen the hands of the people at home. It will, moreover, insure that the national character will develop along native lines.

There can be no doubt that the widespread diffusion of literature in English, created in England, dealing mainly with English or Imperial subjects, saturated with English thought and propagating English ideas is calculated to denationalize the people of this island, and make them ape English manners and fashions. This tendency would undoubtedly be checked to an important extent by the study of Irish and by the spread of an up-to-date Irish Literature such as would claim the attention of all educated men. In order to secure this, our Irish-speaking population must be of considerable extent, must be educated through the medium of their language, and their education must be of a liberal kind: moreover, they must be in touch with the life-throb of modern civilization. It should be borne in mind that the English language, so far from possessing a monopoly of up-to-date science and literature, is far behind French and German in

recent scientific works and in recent works of general literature.

English literature has fallen upon evil days. The wide diffusion of printed matter has brought about an unwholesome revolution in the world of letters. The number of those who can read has grown, but the matter most generally read is light and trivial or ephemeral. The literature of the age reflects clearly the spirit of the age, and in towns and cities and even country districts in Ireland are to be found at a cheap rate books and pamphlets, magazines and newspapers full of the spirit of modern English urban life.

It is not too much to say that the principles that are acted on in social and public life in Great Britain at the present day, as chronicled in the newspaper press and as reflected in current literature, have a strong tendency to bring about the dissolution of society, and to involve the nation in social, political, and moral chaos. Take an important example. The light in which the marriage contract is regarded by all classes of society as witnessed in the proceedings of the Divorce Court, and in the columns of general news, is incompatible with the permanency of marriage as an institution amongst us. Now, it may be said that society among Christian nations is founded on the unity and indissolubility of the marriage tie. Principles, therefore, that assail its unity or indissolubility are striking at the root of human society as organized amongst us. These principles do not work alone, they are accompanied by principles that strike at civil authority, the rights of property, and other institutions that are absolutely essential to our existence as a social organisation. But once marriage is overthrown in society organized on Christian principles, a chaos deeper than ever plummet sounded in social and national life is certain to ensue. The destruction of the institution of marriage is certain to bring with it the fall of the pillars that sustain the entire social fabric, and generations of blood and carnage and great social cataclysms must ensue before the ruin is repaired. Although Ireland is under the same government as Great Britain, and though both countries have much in common in civil institutions and methods of social life, still there is a vast gulf between them in trend of thought, in the way in which they regard the fundamental principles on which social order and human society are based, and, in particular, in their attitude towards the institution of marriage. This country is, to a large extent, still untainted by the teaching of the positivist, the materialist, the hedonist which pervades English literature whether serious or trivial. Now, it is obvious that if the literature that is most widely read and studied and imitated in Ireland come to us across the Channel, it will be