

Pearse's travels through Ireland IN HIS OWN WORDS

PADRAIG Mac PIARAIS has recorded the impression made on him during a series of travels he made through Ireland nearly 60 years ago. The extracts I quote here are taken from articles he contributed to the the Gaelic League organ "An Claidheamh Solais."

The first article is entitled "Cois na Siuire", and appears in the issue of April 5, 1902. It reads:

"I visited Carrick-on-Suir lately and spent a few days amateur organising in and about the town. A visit to an Irish speaking centre produces a mingled effect on a Gaelic Leaguer, partly depressing, partly stimulating, and I found it so at Carrick. On the one hand I met everywhere evidence of decay in language, population and industry.

"Once I crossed the Suir into Co. Waterford, I found Irish among the grown-up people, but I had to travel to Rathgormack to find it among the children. Carrick was once the centre of a woollen industry. The only woollen mill now is at Kilmacthomas, 10 miles away.

"The name Coolnamuck recalls that over a hundred years ago a bacon curing industry was carried on at Carrick. From my hotel window I could see the disused chimney of a saw mill which had been in full swing up to a few months ago.

"What happened to the workers? The answer is saddening. Many went into the army and the militia.

Far from being a lost language

"Irish is very far from being a lost language in Carrick. Passing up the main street on market day last week I noticed several groups conversing in Irish. In the shops business is of necessity done in Irish when the Co. Waterford folk come in to make their purchases. A strenuous, if youthful branch of the Gaelic League is at work.

"The caman too is coming into its own, though rugby is dying hard. Practically every child is now being taught Irish.

"In the Christian Brothers schools I found out that even the very little boys had a knowledge of Irish. In the Mercy Convent Irish is taught, and it goes without saying that it is taught at Mr. Keely's school at Carrickbeg.

"I was scarcely prepared, however, for what awaited me at the Presentation Convent. As I entered the infant school each little mite rose in her place, gravely dropped me a courtesy, and greeted me with 'Cead Mile Failte Romhat'.

"This was certainly promising. It was the first time I had been so greeted on entering an Irish school. At a signal from one of the good nuns the little ones recited the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be To The Father in Irish. The entire was given with a Waterford blas; which would do credit to the oldest gaedhilgeoir in the Decies.

Drove out to Rathgormack

"On Sunday, March 23, some dozen of the Carrick Gaelic Leaguers and myself drove out to Rathgormack in time to catch the people returning from Mass. The first to meet us was Father Paul Power, the Parish Priest. As he approached us in a pony and trap he shouted a special greeting in Irish.

"Mr. Guiney, the schoolmaster, marshalled the people from the church to the schoolhouse. This was the school where John Fleming taught.

"Father Paul having said a few words I came forward to speak. I used Irish exclusively, endeavouring to disguise my decided Connacht accent with a Waterford blas. I spoke for half an hour and everyone seemed to follow what I said. While I was speaking I amused myself by watching the coming and going of emotions in the fine expressive faces before me. What wonderful faces one sees in an Irish speaking district. Truly, the lives of those whose faces are as reverent and replete, must be beautiful and splendid beyond your and my ken.

Beautiful and moving

"When I had finished speaking, an old man came forward and gave me 'Eachtra na Mna Moine'. The scene struck me as a strangely beautiful and moving one. The bare walls of the schoolroom, the sea of intent eager faces, the bent figure of the old man as he leant on the table and recited the old Ossianic lay. In this a poet or painter may find material for epic treatment.

"I realised that the old man had made a far more powerful appeal to the hearts of that audience than had my halting words.

"In that poor schoolroom we felt the mighty presence of Fionn and Oisín, and Patrick, and knew that the past was not dead. When the old man ceased, the school children sang, and the sagart himself sang for us. Then we fell to dancing.

"At last, goodbyes were said, and we left for Carrick. Father Power told us that his parish would send a fine contribution to the Gaelic League fund. And that, as he is about to build new schools, he will also build a hall where sgoireachta will be held."

Spent a month in Co. Cork

In the autumn of 1902, Pearse spent a month in County Cork. Writing in "An Claidheamh Solais" of September 27 he describes how Sunday last was an Irish day in Dunmanway, and continues:

"Dunmanway has the reputation of being one of the most West British places in West Cork.

"Like most such reputations it is probably undeserved. The heart of the people is still Irish. As they poured out from last Mass a piper beguiled them to a platform erected in the centre of the town. The platform was serviceable although it consisted of a dozen planks laid across a few dozen empty porter barrels."

Pearse describes how the crowd were a bit shy at first but as the evening went on the Irish nature within expanded and they grew genial.

Padraig O'Shea of Glengariffe spoke in Irish, so did old Sean Ua Miobhuile, then over eighty-five years of age, who still sported the briste geara, and the cut-away coat.

In the evening, Pearse attended a sgoireacht at St. Patrick's Hall. He records that between dance and song the three hours passed like half-an-hour.

Pearse writes, October 4, 1902:

"In Cork city the most stimulating thing at present is the incipient conversion of the North Parish into an Irish-speaking district. This is partly due to the fine local branch of the Gaelic League, and to the Eason's Hill National School.

"Anyone who drops into those schools and has a chat with the boys in Irish—preferably with young Donal O Ceallachain—will be convinced that given efficient teachers, any Irish schoolboy can be made an Irish speaker in twelve months.

(Donal Oge O Ceallachain (R.I.P.) succeeded Terry McSwiney (R.I.P.) as Lord Mayor of Cork).

Travelled by bicycle

"From Cork I trained to Macroom, and pushed on to Ballyvourney on my bicycle. I made some good progress and