

English language the instrument of Irish literature." This is a pre-eminently practical theme, and, it will be presently found, that Mr. Brooke discussed it in the self-same spirit. The earliest and noblest part of Irish literature, he told his listeners, was national, but not nationalist. It was fully Irish; written out of the hearts of her own people, and it was but little influenced by other literatures. The literature which followed the invasion of Ireland by the English, and accompanied the oppression and misery which then overwhelmed our country, may be said to be nationalist as well as national. It was forced to conceive Ireland as a whole, and as set over against England. In this opposition, and out of this oppression, the patriotic sentiment was born which caused the Irish poets and Irish people to make Ireland into a pathetic personality, who could be loved like a woman and worshipped like a queen. I do not think it too much to say that the modern idea of "nationality" was born for the first time in Ireland. There are many songs addressed to her, conceived of as a beautiful woman, long before the time of Queen Elizabeth. All the warring chieftainries were as one in their common love of her; and this impersonification of Ireland as the lovely and sorrowful woman, oppressed, but never crushed; wounded by England, but always recovering from her wounds, appears in the work of all the Irish-writing poets up to the present century, and continues to appear, during this century, in the poetry written by Irishmen in the English tongue.

One of the deepest roots of English nationality is the continuity of her national literature, and Englishmen have incessantly labored to keep their literature together, to honor it, to extend it. It is invoven with the whole of her national life, and it makes half the passion of her nationality. And if we wish to strengthen Irish nationality, to prove it more clearly to the world, to send it back as far into the past as the nationality of England, we cannot do better than make it largely rest on Irish literature; and we have not done that as yet.

Irish literature is not to Ireland, what English literature is to England. The mass of the Irish people know nothing of it, and

care little about it. That they should know, and should care, will do more for the cause of a true Nationalism, than all our political angers. Moreover, with the perishing of the Irish language, as the tongue of the people—and it is perishing with accelerating speed—the popular interest that once gathered round her past literature, is vanishing away. Ireland is to-day suffering a greater national loss than she imagines. She will bitterly regret it, unless she repent and do work meet for repentance. She knows less of her literature than the French and German scholars know of it. I hope this society and the kindred society in Dublin, will do something to repair this error. Let us have history and politics by all means, but let us take care also of our oldest and fairest heritage. A common love of the beautiful things which distinguish our nation from other nations, will make us love and honor our country more than a common war against those who oppose our nationality.

And, indeed, there is scarcely any modern literature which has been so continuous as ours, or so old. It is true we have no long manuscripts older than the tenth or eleventh century, but the materials out of which the manuscripts were built, go back to a remoter antiquity than either English or Welsh Literature. They contain stories of a finer imaginative quality, than the early Welsh or English stories. Their poetical elements are more instinct with nature and humanity, and they leave a more kindling and inspiring influence on the imagination of other people than flows forth from the beginning of any other vernacular European literature. This early literature is written in the Irish tongue, and it consists, at the beginning of mythical histories, full of wild and romantic episodes. These, which recount the legendary invasions of Erin, in pre-historic times, by tribes whose leaders were divine or half-divine, are of the highest interest to the critical mythologist. But they also contain, or have referred to their period, tales of as great interest to the seeker of fine literature. *The Three Sorrows of Story-Telling*, belong to that distant world—the *Fate of the Children of Lir*, the *Story of the Children of Tuireann*, the *Story of the Sons of Uisneach*. After this mythological cycle, come the successive