

Literary Department.

Gaelic Proverbs.

[Adapted from paper read before the Gaelic Society, University of Ottawa.]

As a branch of Folk-lore, the proverbs of a race must prove an interesting study, especially if there is brought to the subject the enquiring mind of the folk-lorist or ethnologist, for imbedded in the old sayings are the wisdom and philosophy of life, the wit and pathos of the people who have adopted them as their final statement on things that concern or touch them.

In treating of Gaelic proverbs, it must be borne in mind that, as in this paper, only those should be considered which are Gaelic not only in form and in language but obviously so in source and in characteristics; and that with the neglect of the old tongue in which they were first spoken, there must have passed from the ken and memory of the present generation many a *sean-focal*, racy saying, and wise saw. The loss to folk-lore and indeed to history thus sustained is to be regretted.

But, fortunately, there remains of the national literary heritage in respect of proverbial lore a goodly stock which it is the duty of those imbued with the spirit of the Gaelic movement not only to cherish but to use. Possibly among the proverbs still current in Éirland a few have found their way into the language from other races, as is perhaps the case with the national proverbs of other peoples. If so, a close examination will show that in the Hibernian adaptation of them, they have lost nothing of their native force. For of the bulk of Irish or Gaelic proverbs it may safely be said that in felicity of expression, in terseness of phrase, in epigrammatic quality, in compactness of thought, and quick shrewd seizing of a situation with a corresponding readiness to express it, it is hard to beat them. Doubtless much of their force and pungency is due to the fact that they came into being in an age when books were scarce, news-