



### 3.0 Those who Set the Stage

### 3.4 Those primarily concerned with Irish culture

#### 3.4.2 Douglas Hyde, Eoin MacNeill, and the Gaelic League

Douglas Hyde (1860-1949) was born at Castlerea, Co Roscommon, the son of a Church of Ireland clergyman. He was educated by his father and at Trinity College, Dublin, where he studied law. Later, he learned Irish at Ratra, Co. Roscommon, where the language was still spoken but was seemingly in irreversible decline. His life was largely devoted to the study and publication of traditional Irish literature and folklore, his publications including *Amhráin Grádh Chúige Connacht* ('Love Songs of Connacht', 1893) *A Literary History of Ireland* (1899), and his autobiography *Mise agus an Connradh* ('Myself and the Gaelic League', 1931). He also wrote a number of plays, the most notable being *Casadh an tSugáin* (The Turning of the Straw Rope), the first play in the Irish language to be professionally produced (1901). He adopted the pen-name *An Craoibhín Aoibhinn* ('the delightful little branch'). In 1909 he became the first professor of modern Irish at University College, Dublin.

While Hyde's literary contribution was considerable, his monumental achievement was as a cultural activist. In 1893 he chaired the foundation meeting of the Gaelic League which had been convened by Eoin MacNeill; Hyde became the first president, a position he held until 1915. The organisation was non-political and nonsectarian and aimed at involving people of different religious and political loyalties in a common cultural effort. Its objective was the revival of the Irish language and the preservation of Irish literature, music and traditional culture.

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Under the direction of Hyde as president and Eoin MacNeill as secretary, the Gaelic League formulated and implemented an ambitious programme; by 1905 it had 550 branches throughout the country. The branches organised Irish classes conducted by *timirí* (travelling teachers) and also lectures, concerts and Irish dances. From 1899 onwards the Gaelic League published *An Claidheamh Soluis*, an Irish-language weekly newspaper. It staged an annual cultural festival, the *Oireachtas*, and had Saint Patrick's Day designated a national holiday. It also succeeded in having Irish included in the curriculum for primary and secondary schools and in having it made compulsory for matriculation at the National University of Ireland.

While the Gaelic League was strictly non-political and the membership included some unionists, the majority of members were nationalists - in the decades leading up to 1916 most would have been moderates who regarded Home Rule as the only viable objective. The membership also included extreme nationalists, including a number of the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic, who were particularly influential within the organisation. While these eventually gained control in 1915, the main contribution of the Gaelic League to the 1916 Rising had already been made: over a generation the Gaelic League had accomplished significant cultural change in the nationalist population. The young men of the 1916 generation were proud to be Irish and heirs to one of the oldest civilisations in Europe; many of them spoke the Irish language; they cherished their cultural traditions; and, moreover, they were aware of their national history—a history in which Ireland had been unjustly dominated for centuries. While the majority would settle for Home Rule, some believed Ireland was entitled to full independence, an objective for which they were prepared to fight.

### 3.4.2 Douglas Hyde, Eoin MacNeill, and the Gaelic League



Douglas Hyde as a young man.

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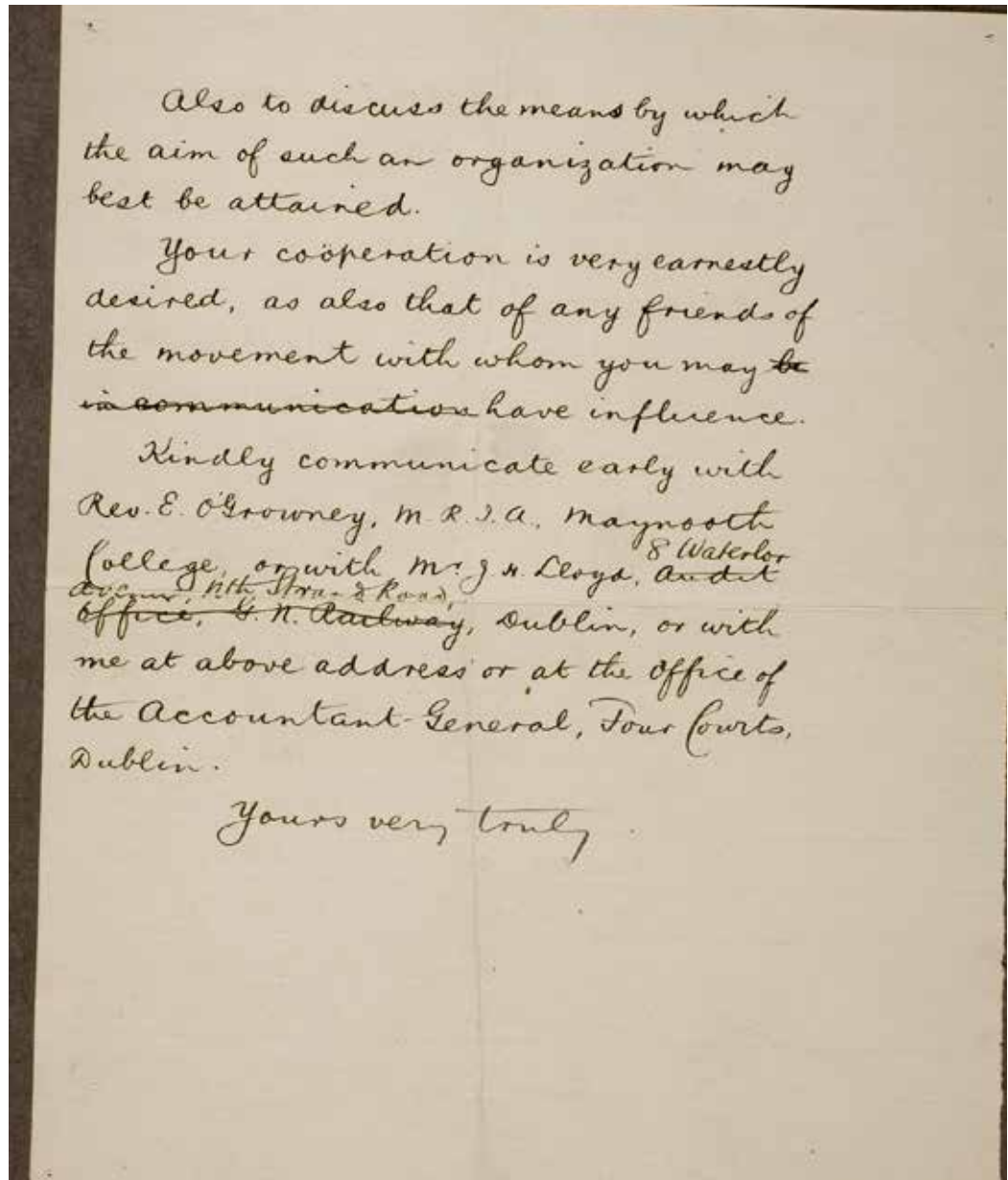
Hazelbrook, Malahide,  
12 June, 1893.

Dear Sir,

It is proposed to arrange,  
by agreement among persons  
interested in the preservation of  
Gaelic as a spoken language, for  
a preliminary consultative  
gathering of <sup>an</sup> ~~a not very~~ <sup>in</sup> formal  
kind // to <sup>initiate</sup> ~~discuss~~ practical steps  
towards the formation, on the lines  
~~The formation of a Society,~~  
~~on the lines indicated in a recent~~  
~~article in the Gaelic Journal,~~  
indicated in a recent article in  
the Gaelic Journal or otherwise  
as may be determined, of  
An Organization to maintain  
and promote the use of Gaelic  
as a spoken language in Ireland:

Draft of letter by Eoin MacNeill proposing the foundation of a society for the preservation of the Irish language. (Ms. 19,315).

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Douglas Hyde, Eoin MacNeill, and the Gaelic League

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Preliminary meeting

At a meeting held on Monday, 13 July 1893, at 9 Lower O'Connell-street, Dublin. Douglas Hyde LL.D. in the chair, the following also present.

Chas Percy Bushe

John McNeill BA

Jas Michl Cogan

Patrick O'Brien.

Thos W Ellerker

J. O'Neill Russell.

Rev. Wm Hayden S.J.

Fitzgerald?

Patrick J Hogan M.A.

Martin Kelly

It was moved by Jm McNeill seconded by Jm Cogan and resolved

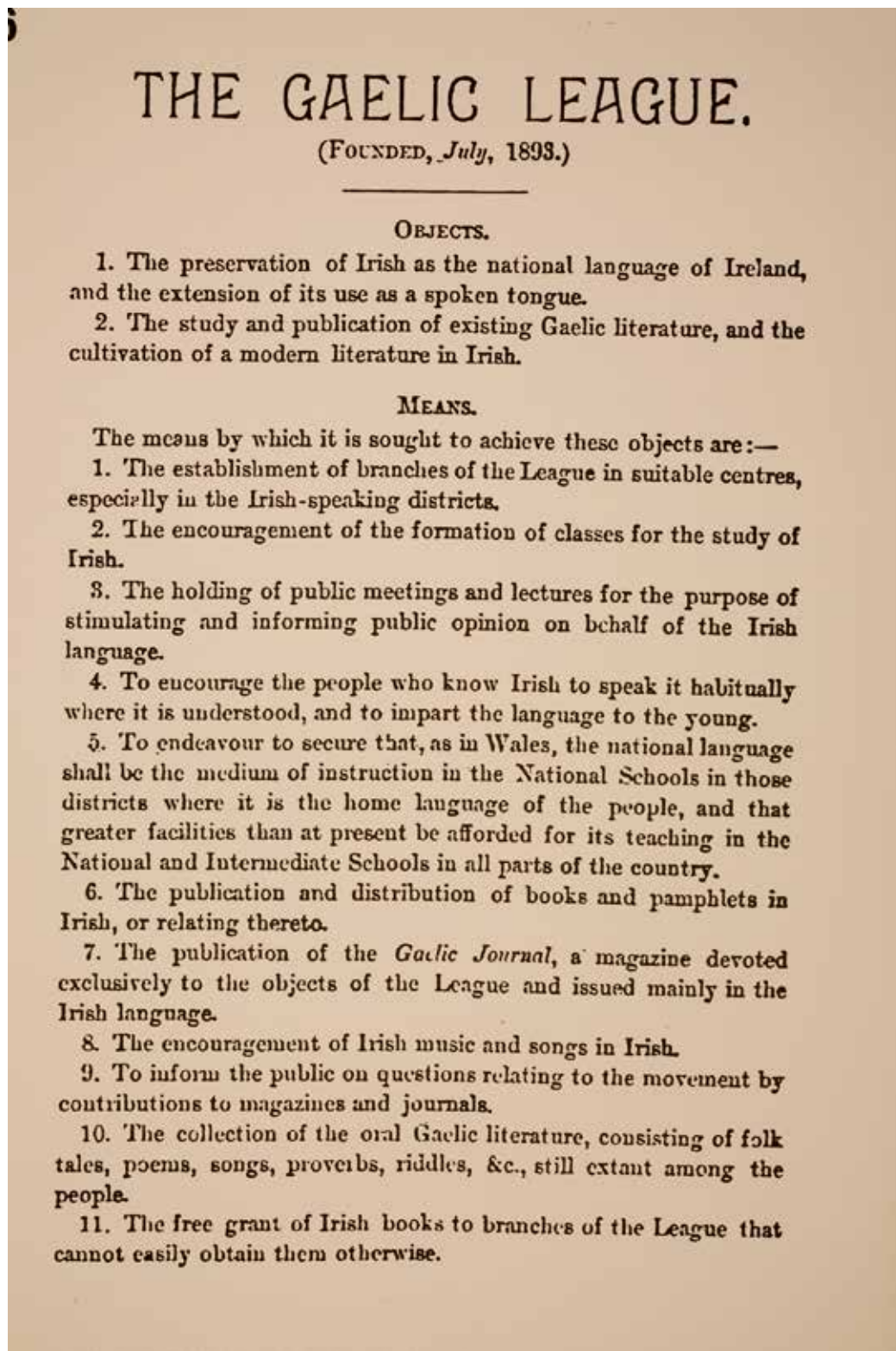
That a Society be formed under the name of the Gaelic League for the purpose of keeping the Irish Language spoken in Ireland.

Moved by J O'Neill Russell, seconded by M Kelly and resolved unanimously.

That we here present constitute ourselves ~~the~~ a Society under the name and for the purpose aforesaid

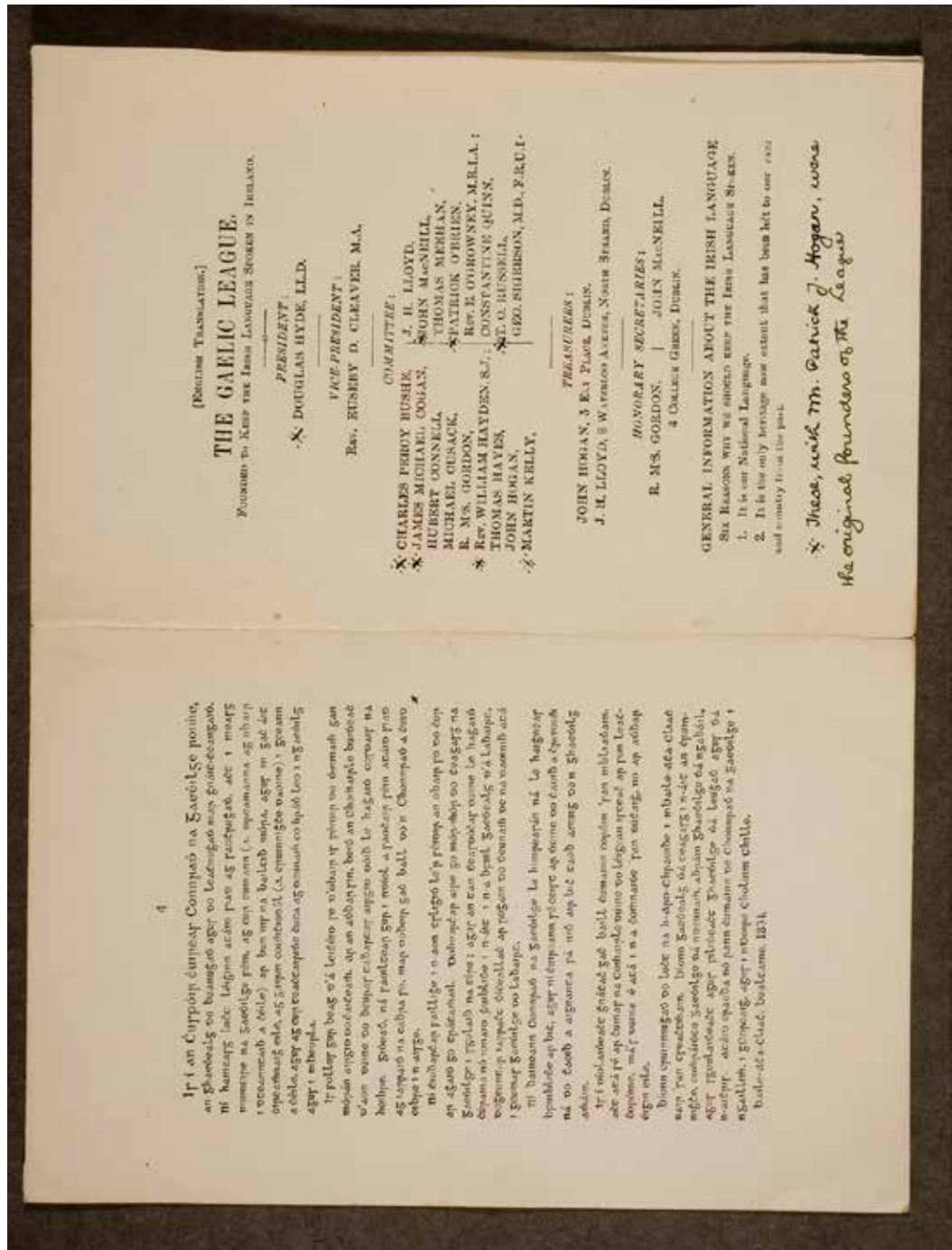
Minutes of the preliminary meeting of the Gaelic League. (Ms. 10,895).

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A Gaelic League leaflet.

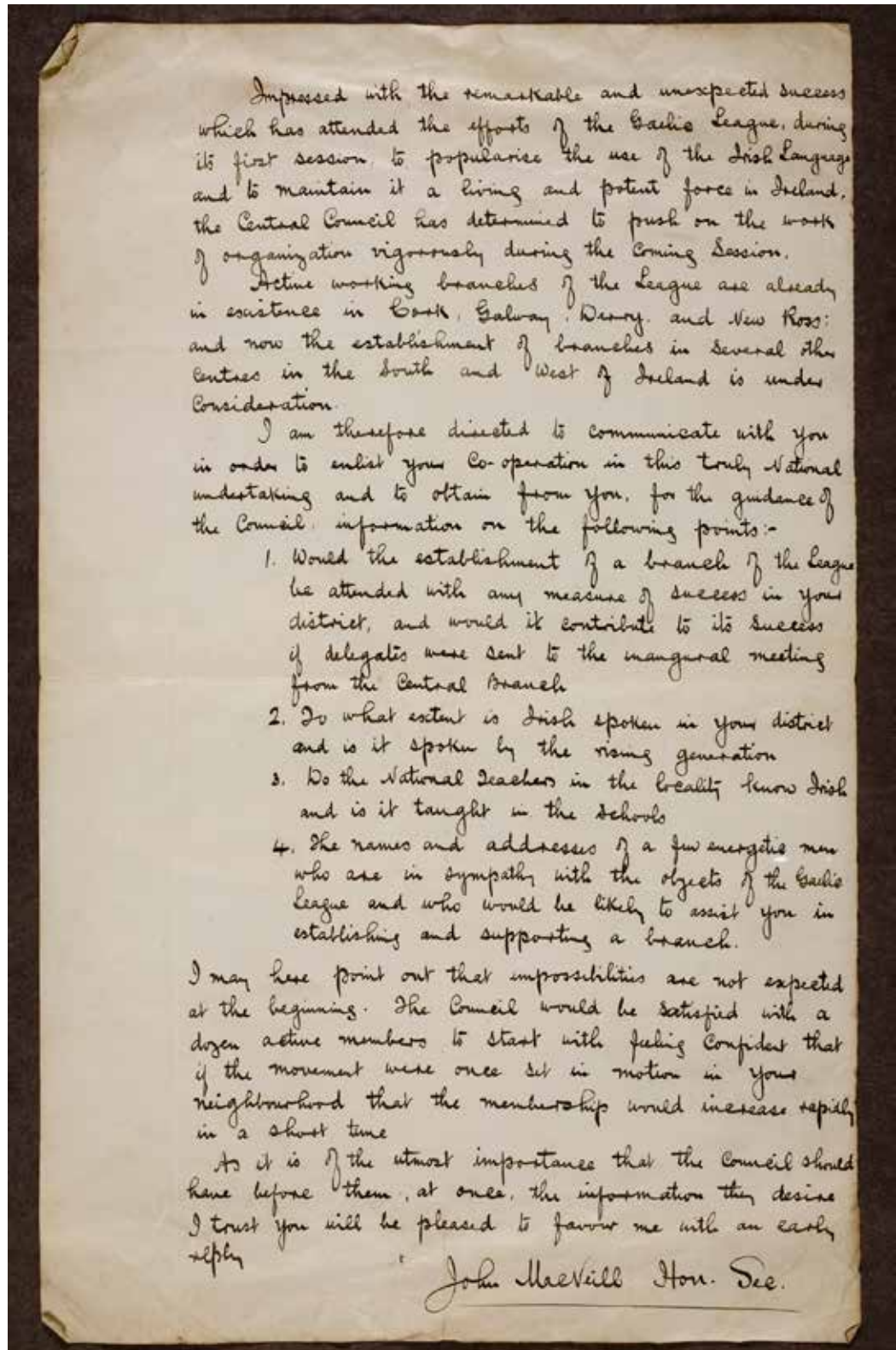
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Pages from Gaelic League brochure, Oct. 1896. (Ms. 10,895).

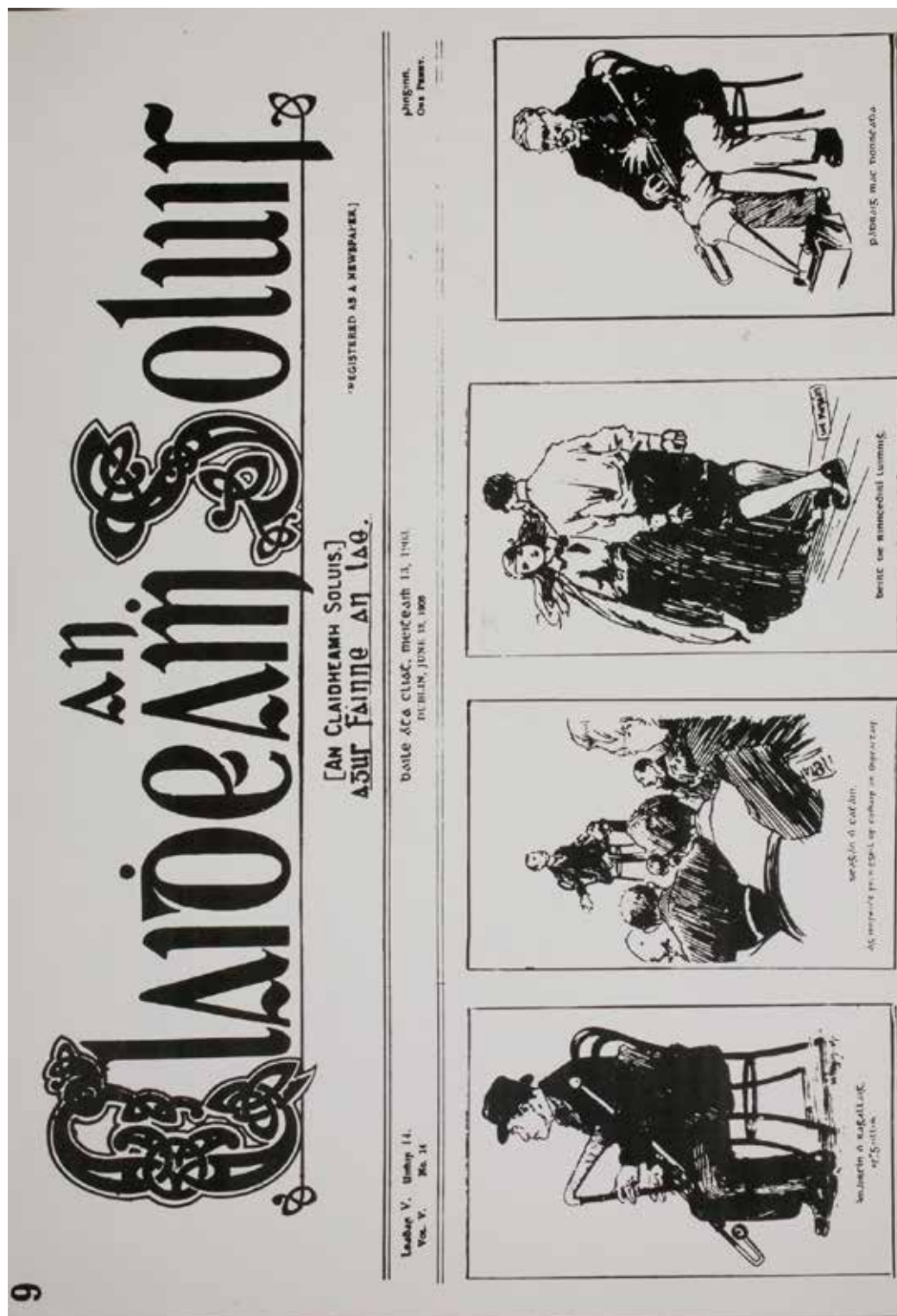


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Statement by Eoin MacNeill on the success of the Gaelic League, 1893-4. (Ms. 10,895).

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Extract from page of An Claidheamh Soluis, 13 June 1903.



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Poster advertising the annual Seachtmhain na Gaedhilge (Irish week), c.1915-16. (Proclamations).