INTRODUCTORY.

A DESIRE to make myself acquainted with spoken Gaelic led me to think of spending the long vacation in Ireland in 1903. Types of southern and western Irish are already familiar from the descriptions of Henebry, Finck and Pedersen, and the hope of finding some closer connection, either in sounds or forms, between the Gaelic of the north of Ireland on the one hand and that of Scotland and Man on the other determined me to endeavour to investigate the form of Irish spoken in Donegal.

Meenawannia is the name of a townland about four miles from Glenties, running due east from the main road to Donegal. It contains some seven cottages, and the inhabitants practically without exception are able to speak Irish. In putting Meenawannia on the title-page of this sketch I do not wish to imply that the townland has a peculiar dialect of its own or that I have not associated with speakers from outside, but simply that the persons to whom I have had most opportunity of listening are natives of the townland. The speech of this small community of between 30 and 40 souls is perhaps even less homogeneous than might otherwise be expected. One of the parents in each family—usually the mother—must almost of necessity come from outside, and the speech of the children is therefore a compromise. Hence in one family cha predominates as the negative, while another has ni almost exclusively, and variants such as an uile, gach uile (gafwel), and amárach, amáreach are similarly distributed among the various cottages. On the other hand the difference between the generations is almost incredible. Meenawannia has so far been practically unaffected by the efforts of the Gaelic League, though I believe more Irish is now spoken there than was the case 10 or 15 years ago. The phonetic decay of the speech of the younger people will be constantly exemplified in this sketch, but more appalling is the introduction of English words. Numbers of the people have
been in America or Scotland for longer or shorter periods, and
when they return the Irish they speak is often little better than
a jargon. Examples such as the following may be heard from at
least 80 per cent. of the people—tá sé mend-áil anois acht tá sé
an-béach-álta—fail-áil mo rye orm—set-álahd an trap—chuala
mé go robh gains (= biseach) oirthi!

Practically no attempts have been made so far to arrest the
decay of the language. It is true that a society has recently
been formed to preserve Ulster Irish, but some time must elapse
before much can be done. There is little or no temptation for
the people to learn to read Irish at present as, apart from the
excellent little texts published by J. P. Craig, Donegal Irish is
practically unrepresented in literature and the dialect is too far
removed from Munster and Connaught speech for the publicat-
ions of the Gaelic League to be intelligible. Even the simple
Connaught tales published by Douglas Hyde are found difficult.
English is the language of the people's devotions, and the school-
masters seldom know sufficient Irish to teach it intelligently.
In one respect they are free from blame, viz. that there is a
dearth of suitable text-books.

As I had never heard any Irish spoken before I first went
over in 1903 my first summer was spent in learning to under-
stand and make myself intelligible. The initial difficulties were
stupendous. I had a fair theoretical knowledge of Connaught
pronunciation which had to be unlearnt, and the vocabulary
was in large measure strange. Worst of all, however, was the
difficulty in getting away from English, a difficulty which has
dogged me all through. That I was able to overcome all these
and other difficulties is due solely to the unfailing kindness of
my host, John Hegarty. J. H. is my chief source of in-
formation, and a word about him may not be out of place. He
was born in 1831, and has spent all his life in Meenawannia,
with the exception of about 18 months. He possesses a far
better knowledge of Donegal Irish than any other person I have
met, and, as far as I can judge, he has been little, if at all,
influenced by book Irish. He has an immense store of tales and
Fenian poems in the vernacular, and it is only a few of the
oldest men and women like himself that are able to speak Irish
in its purity. I take this opportunity of thanking him most
cordially for all his trouble, and for the interest he has taken
in me.

Two courses lay open to me. The one was to rely upon
the language of conversation, jotting down anything of interest. The other was to take down a large number of stories and poems from dictation. The latter course I attempted during my first visit, but abandoned it, as what I took down was frequently very far removed from the colloquial language, and further I was often suspicious of Connacht influence. The texts printed at the end of this volume, however, have all been very carefully revised, and represent J. H.'s speech as far as lay in my power. Hence the bulk of my material has had to be collected whilst herding cows, or chatting at night by the side of a peat fire.

The mode of transcription I have adopted is that of the Association Phonétique, and the only new symbols are o, ò, ã, which represent vowels peculiar to Gaelic. I regret that I have not always been consistent in writing Ù, and ò before consonants. Finck's Araner Mundart has been freely utilised in the present sketch, and I am only sorry that Meyer's Contributions to Irish Lexicography are not further advanced.

Before perusing the texts it is exceedingly important that the paragraphs on Sandhi should be read.

It should perhaps be observed that in the case of the consonants the term palatalisation is here used to denote palatal temper or quality and that it therefore does not imply that the sounds in question are palatalised as opposed to palatal.
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SYMBOLS.

Vowels: a, e, i, o, U, y, ı, ı, u, i, i.
Consonants: h, f, u, L, l, N, n, R, r, m, n, p, b, t, d, k, g.
· before a syllable denotes strong stress.
| after a consonant denotes that that consonant is palatal (palatalised).
| after a final vowel or consonant is sometimes employed to indicate marked shortness of the preceding sound.
· after a vowel denotes length.
" denotes nasalisation.
A. THE VOWEL SYSTEM.

§ 1. We distinguish the following:

Short vowels:—a, e, i, o, U, y, A, o.

Long vowels:—a:, e:, i:, o:, U:, A:.

Diphthongs:—ai, au, a:i, a:u, ei, e:i, iu, oi, xi, uo, yo, ou, oA.

(a) The back vowels a, o, o; o, o; U, o; A, o; y.

§ 2. The only a-sound which occurs in Donegal is the a of French ‘ma’ (Sweet mid-back-wide-outer). In this book a is written for purposes of convenience.

§ 3. This sound frequently represents O.Ir. a in accented syllables before non-palatal consonants, e.g. arm, ‘army’, O.Ir. arm; at, ‘swelling’, O.Ir. att; fanach, ‘to stay, remain’, O.Ir. anaim; capall, ‘mare’, M.Ir. capall; mac, ‘son’, O.Ir. mac; maLach, ‘curse’, O.Ir. maldacht; tachu, ‘to choko’, O.Ir. tachtad; tart, ‘thirst’, O.Ir. tart; taru, ‘bull’, M.Ir. tarb.

§ 4. O.Ir. e before non-palatal consonants in accented syllables usually gives a, e.g. ax, ‘steed’, O.Ir. ech; as, ‘swan’, M.Ir. eia; a:, ‘spice, strip’, awach, ‘fisherman’s net’, M.Ir. eng; dram, ‘crowd’, M.Ir. drein; d’róg, ‘red’, O.Ir. derg; f’er, ‘man’, O.Ir. fer; f’al, ‘white’, M.Ir. gial; k’ee, ‘either’, O.Ir. cheadr; L’ann, ‘child’, M.Ir. lenab; N’al, ‘nest’, M.Ir. net; p’akw, ‘sin’, O.Ir. peccad; f’su, ‘to stand’, M.Ir. sessom; t’a, ‘house’, O.Ir. tech. The fact that O.Ir. accented e and a result in the same sound leads to great confusion when they

1 Strictly speaking this is a mixed vowel but it will be convenient to treat it with the back vowels.
occur initially. Hence the final of the article is frequently palatal in cases where in O.Ir. the initial was a, not e, e.g. ta: f£ e< r' o N' asol = tá sé air an asal, ‘he’s badly drunk’, M.Ir. assal; similarly one only hears o tazsal, ‘the apostle’, O.Ir. apstal, cp. easbal McCurtin, Grammar p. 103; o t'amigor, ‘a back-answer, sharp retort’ < ais-fhreaagar. This uncertainty as to the quality of the old initial we shall have occasion to deal with in § 452. In this connection we might mention the curious form axaN in mor o N' axaN, kinaN, ‘alike, level, equal’, O.Ir. inan. We should expect *poN but compare es for io in Co. Monaghan in ionad, tionntuigh &c. (Gaelic Journal 1896 p. 147 col. 2).

§ 5. Not infrequently a stands for O.Ir. a in accented syllables followed by a palatal consonant, for which ai is now written. This is particularly the case before intervocalic h < th, where the change seems to have occurred already in M.Ir., cp. Meyer athaigim < aithigim. aith-> ath- is also a feature of Desmond Irish, v. Chr. Bros. Aids to the Pron. of Irish p. 86. Examples: kaNuine, ‘to spend, wear, throw’, O.Ir. caithem (Craig writes cathadh); o Nuhe l's, ‘for the sake of’, Di. mar (ar) maithe le, as in o Nuhe l' eiche hein o Ni's o kat kroman, ‘it is for her own good that the cat purs’, N'i: go hoplazN o Nuhe l'e o wUNNasf/vo a'h, Nuhe l'e o f'teifur, ‘not altogether for the sake of profit but also for pleasure’; ma go L'or, ‘alright’ = maith go leór (in every other case maith appears as ma'i5); aNuNe, ‘acquaintance’, aNuNe, ‘acquainted’, Di. aitheanta, aitheanta formed from a5'i, O.Ir. aithne, pret. da'hin m'o, ‘I recognised’, Di. d'aithin; aNuNe, ‘commandments’, Di. aitheanta pl. of aithe, so O.Ir.; aNuNe, ‘brand’, M.Ir. aithne; NuNe, ‘to forgive’, O.Ir. mathem; similarly before r < r' in farag'a, ‘sea’, O.Ir. faragge; fasNeN, ‘ample’, O.Ir. fairsing; mat'sN, infin. of mairim, ‘I remain, last’, Wi. marain. Further before m', v, e.g. am'f'r, ‘weather’, O.Ir. aimser; tayf'a, ‘ghost’, M.Ir. taiidh (note the phrase o Nuhe l' eiche hein aNi: f'mife? N'i: fayf'a i:’, ‘will you take a cup of tea now?’ It would be very acceptable’).

§ 6. In the same way M.Ir. o before palatal consonant gives a in aNf'r'oN’, ‘mass’, Wi. ofiref. M.Ir.

§ 7. We shall find that all long vowels are apt to be shortened before intervocalic h < th. O.Ir. á appears shortened in sNahed, ‘needle’, O.Ir. snathat; sNahed, sNahue, ‘to wash down, spice’, pres. sNahem, pret. nai5, past part. sNahet's, Di. snathadh; ahole, ‘joy’, M.Ir. áithes; tahor, ‘man ist’, M.Ir.
7

atáthar; *N'i: akar < ní fhághthar as in the proverb *N'i: *zhor eswI 8on 8znádI, 'lard is not got without buying'; *mácher, 'mother', O.Ir. *máthir; *drah 8 *Náme 8, 'about this time' = *i dlráth an ama seo, cp. Craig, Iasg. s. dratha; *Lahir' in *N Nam s *Lahir', 'at the present time', always occurs with *a but double forms seem to have existed in the older language.

§ 8. Shortening before a consonant group takes place in *Nád'a plural of *Nád', 'enemy', O.Ir. acc. pl. *náimte.  

§ 9. Irish throughout its history has never been very careful to distinguish *a and *o (cp. Wi. bass, boss) and Donegal speech forms no exception in this respect. In a number of words *a commonly appears instead of *o, *a. These are: *apos, 'and', O.Ir. ocus; *askL, 'arm-pit', M.Ir. ochsal; *bord, 'rough', M.Ir. bord; *bathL't'o, 'wap of hay', Di. batalte < Eng., 'bottle'; *blagéol, 'bald patch' if < Meyer's bloc i. cruinn; *brahán, 'porridge', Di. Macbain brochán, Meyer brochtán; *braLax, 'bottle', Meyer brollach; *faLæn', 'healthy', Di. fóllain (cp. Molloy's 13th dialect-list); *faLælo, 'parched', Di. fočla (with different meaning); *farwe, 'root', M.Ir. forud; *faskwe, 'shelter', O.Ir. foscad; *kagnwe, 'to chew', M.Ir. coenam; *kzL, 'hazel', O.Ir. coill; *kasKort', 'to strike, thaw', O.Ir. coscar; *magwe, 'to mock' < Eng., cp. Louth mogadh; *sez, 'wisp', M.Ir. sopp (note *fi8n o *sez o *row o *tisch *8N, 'das also war des Pudels Kern'); *skahan, 'mirror', M.Ir. scathan; *ght:rakan, 'numbness', cp. *tgh: *kluw *ght:ru:kan *8N ma *čof, 'my foot is asleep'. As in O.Ir. there are other substantival terminations which give -an in Donegal, e.g. -on, -un in mecon, in a number of words we find hesitation between -an and -an. Thus the form just mentioned occurs as *m' akan and *m' akan (the word is used principally of 'carrots' but it is also applied to the roots of dock and agrimony, *LoS *N m' akan, 'fungus, moss'). By the side of the regular form *Lahkan, 'wide', O.Ir. lethán, one also hears *L'ahan. Similarly *g'abwean, *g'abwan, 'sparrow', Dinneen gealbhán, M.Ir. gleubd; *rusken, 'cockle' = Di. ruacán. Adjec-
tives are formed from substantives ending in -an by the addition of -tə, e.g. makəntə, ‘civil, decent’, lit. ‘filial’ < O.Ir. macēn, ‘puerulus’; spadəntə, ‘seedy, out of sorts’, Di. spadánta; f’ia ntə, ‘wild’ (used of people), Di. fiadhanta; ãweo ntə, ‘foolishly prating’, formed from ãweor’, Di. amhl6ir, M.Ir. obloir.


§ 11. In a number of cases a represents an older ō (for the same change in S. Ulster see G. J. 1896 p. 147 col. 1). The suffix denoting the agent -ör appears regularly in Donegal as -or, but when the abstract suffix -axt is added a appears for ō—thus titəor’, ‘thatcher’, Di. tuighead6ir but titəoraxt, ‘thatching’.

Similarly spəməjələxət, ‘strolling about’, Di. spaisteoireacht; N’ənləraxtə, ‘idling’, cp. Eng. ‘star-gazing’, Di. neallad6ireacht. Here we may also mention fənənəntiə, ‘preacher’, Di. seanm6ntaidhe, cp. fənomor’, ‘sermon’. Just as -ör becomes -or, so the feminine termination -og, O.Ir. -og is reduced to -ag and commonly to -ag, especially by the younger people, e.g. fəvənər’ag, -ag, ‘window’, M.Ir. fuindeog; fənələg, ‘sea-gull’, cp. O.Ir. folenn; kyN’ag, ‘churn-dash’, M.Ir. cuindeog. In the plural the ō is perhaps more firmly rooted, e.g. m’iəntog, ‘nudges’; awog; ‘wessels’; b’axog; ‘bees’. In the genitive and dative singular the vowel is generally a, or ə in NyN’ag, ‘on the window’; gah b’axogə, ‘the sting of a bee’.

§ 12. O.Ir. e in the terminations -en, -el, -et appears as a. A similar change seems to have taken place in all the Irish dialects, cp. Finek i p. 26; Henebry p. 29. é first gave ə as in accented syllables, then ja(). éa < O.Ir. é is not unknown in stressed syllables, cp. Henderson, ZCP. iv 90 and Molloy’s 36th dialect-list, where the forms cəd, cədail, cəDTrom and cəgoθine are quoted. Examples: kivəd, ‘to watch, look at’, also ‘to mind’ in kivəd do câoss, ‘mind your feet’, Di. coimhead, Wi. comét; k’inəl, ‘sort, kind’, O.Ir. cinél, cén6l, Di. cinél, similarly k’nəlLts, ‘kind’ (adj.); k’lən, ‘pup’, M.Ir. culen; kəN’əl, ‘corner’, Di. coinéal; kai’j’ən, ‘triump’h, M.Ir. caithréim; d’iən, ‘a scart’,
Di. duibhéan (‘cormorant’). *bærəd, ‘cap’, Di. bairéad has doubtless been influenced by some word like *bærəua, M.Ir. berrad, ‘to shave, dress the hair’. In any case the Donegal form has kept the * which we should expect from the Munster form. bearad which Dinneen gives as the Donegal form should have the length-mark. Dinneen’s sources of information for Donegal forms, J. P. Craig and J. C. Ward, unfortunately make a practice of omitting the length-mark in -án, -áil, -óir &c., which is most reprehensible, as their manner of spelling gives no clue to the pronunciation.

§ 13. Donegal Irish shows a distinct preference for * before * in the termination -ach (O.Ir. -ach, -eoch), e.g. *lax*, ‘cattle’, O.Ir. ellach; *maxax*, ‘to-morrow’, M.Ir. imbárách; *g’arax*, gen. sing. of *g’ar*, ‘tallow’; *máax*, ‘to depart’, M.Ir. imthecht; *rasplaxaxn*, ‘rough and ready going fellow’, cp. rasplóhusu:, ‘hubbub’, Di. rapla húta; *f’iáX*, ‘plough’, M.Ir. sessrech; *t’alax*, ‘hearth-stone’, M.Ir. tenlach; *ulax*, *ú:kaX*, ‘caves’, plur. of *u:i*, This same fondness for * before * is further seen in accented syllables in the case of diphthongs, which contain * as their second element, e.g. *f’iaX*, ‘crow’, O.Ir. flásh; *f’iáX*, ‘debits’, also plur. of *f’io*, ‘deer’, M.Ir. flid; *f’iáXel’, ‘to try’, Wi. féchaim; *k’ax*, ‘plough’ (not common), O.Ir. cécht; *p’r’axelo*, ‘perished with cold’, Di. préacha; *uxaX*, plur. of *u:i*, ‘udder’, M.Ir. uth; *uxaX(o)*, ‘pledge’, Di. udhacht.

§ 14. In proclitics * represents a variety of vowels: *fà*, ‘about’, Di. fá (for the form v. § 314); *a hein’, ‘himself’, é hein; *a N’á:rN*, dia dheanfhainn; *d’a ·lti:n*(), ‘Friday’, dia haoine; *a*, ‘descendant’ (in proper names) a bwi:L’, ‘O’Boyle’, the full form is *; ma * (me), ‘my’, O.Ir. mo.

2. *:

§ 15. *: represents in this book the vowel-sound in French ‘rage’ (= *a:*) which is the same sound as the short * a: but lengthened. It remains independent of the quality of the following consonant, as in *d:am*, ‘ferry’, gen. sing. *d:an*; *gra:N*, ‘ugly’, comp. *gra:k*(); *kra:n*, ‘sow’.


§ 17. O.Ir. * in accented syllables followed by *d, g (Mod.Ir. dh, gh) preceding *w < O.Ir. * m, b gives *; e.g. *amod*, ‘timber’,
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§ 18. O.Ir. accented e (not a, see § 70) followed by d, g + a or o gave a:gz, a:go which contracted to a:; e.g. m’a:’gmon, ‘weight’, Di. meadhachan, cp. Wi. med; m’a:N’Le:, ‘mid-day’, Wi. medón; f’L’a:n, ‘turf-spade’, Di. sleaghán, M.Ir. sleg. Occasionally in monosyllables ending in O.Ir. in ed, thus f’a:, ‘fathom’, ga: a:, ‘2 fathoms’, Di. feadh, O.Ir. ed (for the pronunciations f’ig and f’ig’ see §§ 170, 429).

§ 19. O.Ir. accented a, e, followed by th + a result in a: but here we sometimes find double forms, e.g. ra:’g N’a:’t9, ‘a drift of snow’; Dinneen has ráithe, plur. ráthacha (Derry), according to J. H. the nom. sing. is mass but the gen. ra:’g is fem., as is frequently the case with words not often used, nom. plur. ra:’g N’y: (forms containing á before th may be quoted here as according to § 7 the long vowel would be shortened); sLa:’g, ‘slush on the sea-shore’, also sLahax, Di. sláthach; b’a:’g, ‘beast, horse’, Meyer bethadach, plur. b’ahi.; bla:’g, ‘buttermilk’, M.Ir. bláthach.

§ 20. The a: in d’a:nuw, ‘to do’, O.Ir. dénum, is surprising and is probably to be attributed to the influence of the preterite form N’i.: há:N’, where the vowel development is regular. tá:N’/a:’g, ‘thunder’, M.Ir. toirnech by the side of to.’rN’ref, ‘a great noise’, Di. tóirneis, is peculiar but may be due to a different grade in the root.

§ 21. a: arises regularly by lengthening before certain combinations of l, r, n with another consonant1. This occurs before Lt, e.g. a:LT, ‘cliff’, M.Ir. alt; b’a:LTin’a, ‘May’, M.Ir. beltene; ga:LTin, ‘Protestant’, Di. gallda < M.Ir. gall.


rd, e.g. k’a:rt9, ‘forge’, Wi. cerdcha but there is no lengthening before rt, cp. k’art, ‘right’, M.Ir. cert; kartu9, ‘to cleanse’, Meyer cartain; kartan, ‘sheep-louse’, Meyer cart.

1 The short vowel is however often heard in a number of the cases.