

Brian King of Munster

A. S. Green

With the coming of Brian Boru, born in the village of Bóromha near the modern Killaloe, a new force appeared in Irish history [1].

In the Ulster Annals the history of Brían Boru is brief. Born in 941, his first act recorded there is at the age of thirty-seven (978) to avenge his brother's death. He is not mentioned again for twenty years, till in 998, then fifty-seven years old, he along with Mael Seachlinn the high-king took hostages of the Foreigners for their submission to the Irish, and led a hosting through Leinster. In 999 (on this one occasion he is called "king of Cashel") at Glen Mama he routed the Foreigners of Dublin and the Leinster men, and went afterwards into Ath Cliath, which he pillaged. In 1000 he made a hosting with Leinster into Breg against Mael Seachlinn : in 1002 a hosting to Athlone, where he took hostages of Connacht and Meath, and with Mael Seachlinn at Dundalk led away pledges of the northern kings. Between 1003 and 1012 he made eight circuits or hostings in the provinces of the northern Half, in one of which (1004) he laid an offering of gold on the altar in Armagh ; in another (1011) he was in camp with Mael Seachlinn. In 1007 Cuchonnact, chieftain of Sil-Anmchada in Connacht, was treacherously "slain by Brían." His wife, daughter of Cathal king of Connacht, died in 1009. In 1013 he led a hosting to "Ath-in-chairthinn" (not identified), where he stayed three months. He constructed numerous fortresses, some in his own country. His son Murchad was warring in south Leinster. When the Leinstermen and the Foreigners made war against him, Brían and the men of Munster encamped at Slíab-Mairci and plundered Leinster to Ath Cliath, the son of Mael Seachlinn fighting on his side. Finally in 1014 Brían, now for the first time styled "king of Ireland," along with Mael Seachlinn "king of Tara," led a hosting to Ath Cliath against the men of Leinster and the Foreigners and fought the "valorous battle . . . for which no likeness has been found." This terse and inexact biography expands somewhat at the close. When Brían lay dead on the field of Clontarf the annalist gave him the title of "ardri of the Gaedhil of Ireland, and of the Foreigners and Britons, the Augustus of all the north-west of Europe" [2].

Thus in his life of seventy-three years only the last sixteen are noted by the northern annalists as having in them anything worth recording. The reserve and brevity of the tale give us a measure of the enormous difficulties that confronted Brían. They illustrate the indignant hostility of the Uí Neill, and of orthodox tradition, at the adventure of one of an obscure house, little known save to its own rough forests and hill fastnesses, who achieved not only the kingship of Cashel but the lordship of all Ireland in a sense new to ancient history. The story of Brían, so carefully concealed in the Annals of Ulster, is amplified in the impassioned writings of his admirers, whose propaganda, with its later additions of poetic fables, may mislead as much as the calculated omissions of the orthodox annalists.

The kingdom of the Dál gCais, Thomond or North Munster (occupying the eastern half of the present county of Clare), which had been in the time of the Five Provinces a part of Connacht, was by the division into Seven Provinces included in Munster. Some traditional ties may have lingered on from its older history. As a border territory it had strengthened itself by enduring friendships and alliances with adjoining *tuatha* of Connacht—Aidne, Uí Maine, and the Delbna [3]. Ruled by princes of the Eóganacht line it was a "free" state under the Cashel kings. It first comes into note under king Lorcan, grandfather of Brían, of whom the story goes that the high-king (879-916) Flann Sinna (of the Shannon) encamped his army on the plain of Mag Adhair by the mound four miles from Tulla where the Dál gCais chiefs were inaugurated under an ancient tree. When he contemptuously sat down there to play a game of

chess, Lorcan called his hosting for a surprise and defeated the high-king in a three days' fight [4]. After 920, when the Danes of Limerick seemed about to hold Munster as firmly as the men of Dublin controlled Leinster, the helpless rulers of Cashel were challenged by Lorcan and his son Cennétig. On the death of Flaithbertach in 944, Cennétig demanded election as king of Cashel, but was defeated in battle by Cellachán.

In eighteen, years after Flaithbertach's death five kings reigned and disappeared in Cashel, leaving no record but the dates of their extinction, two of them slain by their own people. After these unfortunates came two shadowy "royal heirs," sons of the king slain in 959. The place of the enfeebled race was claimed by other branches of the Eóganachta.

One line of this race known as the Uí Eachach [5], "lords of Desmond" or south Munster, had their ancient capital in Rath Raithlenn, some six miles north of Bandon [6], whence they ruled from Cork west to Mizen Head and Bantry Bay, over a larger territory than any other of the kings in Munster, even of Cashel itself. The royal city was said by legend to be named after the nurse of the king Corc known to Patrick : in bardic poetry "Rathcorc" was the common title. The central fort remains with its triple ramparts, round which were ranged a dozen lesser raths still existing, and many others (some even in living memory) now levelled to the ground—raths of the guards and fighting men, of the "harper of the hill," whose name is even now remembered in the name of the town-land "Rath-Culleen," of the chief trumpeter, of the poets, the women, the door-keeper. Mac Liag, Brían's court historian, described the famous capital, with the fort of Sadbh, daughter of Brían, the Road of Chariots on the north, the Ford of Spoils on the east, the Road of the Mules "below" [7]. There the patron saint of Cork, S. Finbar, had been born, son of the "chief metal-worker" or armourer of the king (c. 570). The lord of Raithlenn stood by Cormac at Belach Mugna in 908, and was slain with him [8]. In the practical anarchy of the south that followed the battle the centre of power was gradually pushed back from Cashel into Desmond, and rising ambitions added to the misfortunes of the province. Maelmuadh king of the Uí Eachach (born c. 930) claimed in 959 the succession to Cashel as being of the elder line, "for Eógan Mór was senior to Cormac Cas." He took hostages of Munster as security for the allegiance of the province [9].

Other claimants however had arisen in Thomond, or north Munster—the vigorous stock of the Dál gCais, who in their lesser territory boldly claimed Eóganacht descent from Ailill Olom son of Mug Nuadat, the hero who in the third century divided Erin with Conn of the Hundred Battles, and with him shared the renown of the two lines which had "sustained the sovereignty of Erin from the time of Éremon son of Miledh and Éber his brother and from the beginning of the world" [10]. The two sons of Cennétig, Mathgamain (Mahoun) and Brían, were hard-pressed by the Danes of Limerick, whose vast fortified camp at the mouth of the Fergus as it falls into the Shannon below the city held the military site that was selected in 1277 by Thomas de Clare as his headquarters and castle of Bunratty for the subjection of Thomond. They kept up a guerrilla war with the Foreigners from the fastnesses of forests and deserts, where their followers, dispersed in caves and hidden huts and knotty wet roots of the wood, scant of food, fought with no quarter on either side. When Mahoun and the Danes, each "tired of the other," agreed on a time of truce, Brían indignantly fell back deeper into the waste solitudes, "because however small the injury he might do to the Foreigners he preferred it to peace." In this bitter conflict his little band slew the enemy in twos and three and fives, "and when he inflicted not evil on them in the day time he was sure to do so in the next night, and when he did it not in the night he was sure to do it on the following day." Wretched, unpitied, wearied, his people were cut off till it was reported he had but fifteen followers alive. An old poet composed a talk of the brothers—Mahoun's grave lament for the slain, among whom Brían now stood alone in his desperate wars, and Brían's noble defence of the dead. A prose writer gives the bitterness of Brían's reproach to his brother—that

Lorcan would never have made such a truce as he, Mahoun, had made with the Danes—Lorcan who gave not submission to the king of Erin, or to the Five Provinces of Erin, for as much time as that in which he could have played one game of chess on the green of Mag Adhair. When Mahoun retorted that “he would not like to leave the Dál gCais dead in following him as Brían had left the most of his people,” the answer was swift—it was hereditary, said Brían, for all the Dál gCais to die as their fathers had done before them, but it was not natural or hereditary to them to submit to insult or contempt, and it was no honour to them to abandon to dark Foreigners and black grim Genti the inheritance which their fathers and grandfathers had defended in battle even against the chiefs of the Gaedhil. The quarrel between the supposed weak and yielding Mahoun and Brían of the resolute purpose was evidently one of great bitterness—the precursor of the second and fatal difference between the two brothers.

An assembly of the kingdom was then called to decide on peace or war, when Brían won the day. The Dál gCais (in diplomatic phrase “by counsel of Mahoun”) voted as with the voice of one man to expel the Foreigners and free Cashel of the kings, “the Ailech of Munster and the Tara of Leth Moga”—the place of their origin and their ancient birth-right. Gathering allies from the Eóganachta of the west, and aided by the Connacht Delbna, they marched to Cashel the year after the death of its king, son of Cellachán, in 963. It was a defiance of Ivar king of Limerick, who claimed a wide territory. Ivar, having murdered the chiefs most friendly to the Dál gCais, gathered his host to attack Cashel. The two armies met in 967 at Sulcoit, the sallow-wood near Tipperary, in a fight that lasted from sunrise till midday, when the Foreigners were routed with great massacre—Brían “chief in the combat,” along with Cathal of the Delbna-mór, “king-soldier and champion of Erin” (whose land lay on both sides of the Shannon north of the town of Roscommon), in friendship and kinship with the Dál gCais. The victors pursued the fugitives in the “mighty rout” over the great plain till evening, and through the night carried on their march to Limerick. The fort was sacked “and the good town reduced to red fire.” Every captive “that was fit for war was killed, and every one that was fit for a slave was enslaved.” Ivar was driven oversea, his stewards and billeted mercenaries slain or cast out, and Mahoun acknowledged king of Cashel; he “who first swept the Foreigners out of west Munster” (968).

The challenge was thus thrown down to Maelmuadh king of Desmond, who ten years before had asserted by taking hostages his lordship of Munster [11]; and to his ally across the Galtees, Donnabhan of the Uí Fídgenti, king of what is now county Limerick from Bruree to the Shannon [12]. It seems that these kings, “more jealous of the Dál gCais than fearful of the Danes,” had taken no part in the battle of Sulcoit, and Mahoun was able to establish himself in a disputed and perilous rule as king of Munster for half-a-dozen years (970-976). A new settlement may have been indicated by the visitation in 973 of Munster by the *comarb* of Armagh, “and he obtained his demand” of tribute from the south [13]. Dangers however had not abated. After a year Ivar had returned in 969 with a great fleet, and entrenched himself on the western harbour of Limerick and the islands of the Shannon, with his headquarters on Inis-Cathaig in the monastery of the abbot-king Flaithbertach; whence he made many spoils and battles, and apparently bargained with Maelmuadh of Desmond and Donnabhan of the Uí Fídgenti, still not so much drawn to him by love of the Foreigners as by hatred and jealousy towards the Dál gCais. Mahoun seems to have yielded before the formidable combination. According to the tradition of the poets, he “shunned Brían” [14], as he had done nine years before in the conflict over terms of submission to the foe. Deliberately he himself “went into the house of Donnabhan,” the formal sign of submission and renouncing supremacy [15]. From him he was probably to proceed to yield allegiance to his rival the king of Desmond; for the legend tells that he had first secured the protection of the *comarb* of Barri or Finbar, the saint of Rath Raithlenn and founder of Cork, that he should not be killed or blinded. The

story goes that Mahoun was sent on by Donnabhan to Maelmuadh, who had remained with the *comarb* at Raithin Mor in Fermoy, despatching his men to meet Mahoun at Cnoc-an-Rebhraidh or Slíab Caein, the modern Slieve Riach, on the borders of Limerick and Cork. There he met his mysterious death. It was reported that “Maelmuadh instructed his people when Mahoun should come into their hands to kill him forthwith. Mahoun therefore was killed by Maelmuadh, and it would have been better for him that he had not done so, for it proved to be a deed of great ruin to him.” What were the true facts we can never know, so overlaid was the story for many years to come with the lively inventions of partisan pamphleteers and propagandists. Their fables can but deepen the tragedy of that day. For more than five centuries there had been no challenge to the rule of the Cashel dynasty ; and the bitterness of the present strife was none the less keen when it had become fatally clear that the ancient line had lost in the last seventy years honourable renown, and the power to rule or protect their province.

Brían became the avenger of his brother ; “and he was not a stone in the place of an egg ; and he was not a wisp in the place of a club ; but he was a hero in the place of a hero ; and he was valour after valour.”

Brían Boru, so called from his birth in the village Bóromha, was closely bound up with that region [16]. The fort that stood where the Shannon issues from Loch Derg was still known in 1797 as “Brían’s fort” and is even now locally called “Ballyboroo.” Cenn-coradh or Kincora, “the head of the weir,” Brian’s stronghold and dwelling-place, stood in what is now Killaloe on the higher ground near the bridge, which in Brían’s time was a bridge of wood. The remarkable rock famous among the bards, Craig-liath, the home of Aibhinn the banshee of the Dál gCais, where the “Banshee’s well” gushes out from among the ferns, is still in legend the “house of Brían,” and the field below it his “horse-park.” There is no more beautiful view in Ireland than from the hills that bound Loch Derg, looking across the sacred island of Iniscealtra with its many churches, its host of ancient tombs (among them the “VII Romani” of some far unknown pilgrimage), and its round tower of Danish times. On all sides lay the woods where Brían’s workmen felled the trees and built on the spot his new warboats, slipping them down to the water till his fleet of three hundred vessels on the Shannon rivalled the Danes on inland waters.

Born in 941, Brían was three years old when his father Cennétig was beaten back from Cashel (944), and twenty-two when he marched with his brother to establish there the Dál gCais line (964). Twelve years later he was heir to the murdered king Mahoun. His stormy youth of what seemed disastrous and desperate war revealed the endurance, the defiance of compromise, the inflexible will, which distinguished him through the changing scenes of his life—guerrilla war in woods and deserts ; kingship in Cashel ; high-kingship of Ireland. In all adventures he showed the same daring, the same rejection of those traditions, and those only, that had in changing times proved useless and lost their value, the same fertility in resource ; and with all his audacity an endless patience. One purpose governed his life—to free his country from foreign dominion. His experience at Limerick had shown him what war can and cannot do. It was impossible to expel the Foreigners from their sea-ports. But if they remained they must not be rulers. They must be of the Irish nation and of Irish civilization. To that end the Irish people must develop a more organized central command than any Irish king in history, free from coercion of foreign piracy and war, had needed or attempted to create. If Brían was an idealist, he was not a romantic. He was perhaps the greatest “realist” Ireland has known, at all times keeping pace with a changing world. His sense of realities taught him how far he could go and when to draw back. Warrior as he was by the hard training of his youth, where any peace was possible his one object was to avoid fighting. The true dignity of his character, and his single devotion to his country’s salvation, may be measured by the fact

that in all the changing circumstances of his life we do not find a case in which personal humiliation or personal ambition was to him of any account.

For two years after 976 Brían's first task was to avenge his brother and secure his own command. The islands of the Shannon were attacked in 977, Ivar king of the Foreigners and two of his sons killed, and the abundant treasures of the island fortresses carried off [17]. The next year he made a foray into Donnabhan's land, where another son of Ivar was sheltered. Both were slain. In 978 he sent his confidential officer to Maelmuadh to carry a challenge from his son Murchad to single combat ; with a further demand from Brían that Maelmuadh should surrender himself as atonement for the murder, or meet him after a full fortnight in open battle at Belach Lechta, a chasm in the mountain now known as Ballahoura in the region of Loch Gur and Ardpatrik [18]. There fell Maelmuadh and twelve hundred of his troops, Danes and Irish. Brian's victory was immediately followed by the work of conciliation which remained the dominant purpose of his life. In 979 he married his daughter Sadbh to Maelmuadh's son Cian, with whom he made an enduring friendship. "Cian of the golden cups" [19], beyond all Irishmen in stature and beauty and generosity, "who never turned his steps backwards in battle," "who never put anyone out of his house, and who has not been put out of the house of God" —according to Mac Coise, the chief bard of Mael Seachlinn, "as gallant and generous a prince as the house of Heber ever produced"—left his name to the fortress city "the rath of Corc and Cian." Brían and Cian were together in every battle till the day of Brían's death. Cian was with him against the Danes at Portlairge (979) ; in Ossory and Leinster when he secured the kingship of Munster (982) ; at Athlone and Dundalk when he attained the kingship of Ireland ; at his last battle of Clontarf (1014).

Brían was thus in 978 undisputed king of Cashel in spite of a shadowy "royal heir" (+988) of the old line, son of the king slain by his own people in 959. For the next twenty-two years his work was to re-organize and protect a shattered and distracted province. The power of the Danes in the west had been checked. But in the east the Foreigners of Waterford and Dublin had practically subdued Leinster to their control, and might now complete their mastery of south Ireland by a network of trading stations to the Shannon and Cork. Munster could not stand long with a hostile Leinster in so threatening a position, and for mere security the king of Cashel was forced to become king of Leth Moga. He carried war over the Déisi, plundering even to Portlairge, and taking hostages of all the south "as the fruit of his arms then" ; even hostages of the principal churches that they should not receive rebels nor thieves to sanctuary (978-979). Ossory was next invaded, and its king taken in fetters as hostage. At Dinn Ríg on the banks of the Barrow near Leithlin Bridge, Brían compelled the homage of the two Leinster kings of the eastern and western plains of the Liffey (984). He could now advance a claim to rule from sea to sea not only over Munster, but over Leth Moga.

The work of settlement carried out by Brían was difficult and dangerous. The only clue we have to it lies in the "Book of Rights," guided by the elaborate analysis by Dr. MacNeill. It appears that a new version of Cormac's "Book" was brought out by Brían's court-poet, probably about 1000-1001 A.D., and certainly before 1014. To the old record new material was added, from which we can gather the policy designed and carried out by Brían.

In Cormac's time Munster was reckoned to contain twenty kingdoms, twelve tributary under native princes, and (leaving out Ossory) seven free states, about a third of the whole province, ruled by kings of the Eóganacht lineage [20]. Brían, breaking away from the old tradition that all states founded by princes of the central dynasty were free and exempt from tribute, established a new policy. Three kingdoms in a continuous line from the Shannon to Youghal harbour, once held free, were now laid under tribute, whether as punishment for hostility or to increase the power of Cashel : the land of the Uí Fidgenti where Donnabhan

had ruled ; Aine, round Knockany in county Limerick ; and Glennamain or Glanworth. No specific tributes however were as yet demanded from the non-exempt free states. Only three free states besides Cashel were left by Brían exempt from tribute, the kingdom of the Dál gCais, and two in the far south-west—Raithlenn from Cork to Bantry, and Loch Léin, now Killarney, where it was probably thought imprudent to diminish ancient franchises.

As for the non-free states the old tributes were changed in almost every instance, the total sum paid to Cashel being much heavier ; in certain states the difference was enormous. Corca Duibhne, covering the peninsulas between the bays of Kenmare and Tralee, formerly charged with thirty cows, thirty oxen, and thirty mantles, had now to pay a thousand cows and a thousand oxen. In old days it might have been impossible for a Cashel king to levy a heavy tribute from a state at the farthest extremity of his province. Brían was powerful enough to enforce his will and enrich his resources.

But wherever Brían, whether to increase his revenue and power, or to punish hostility to his rule, replaced tradition by his revised system, his changes were made with careful regard to custom and conditions. It was probably thought necessary to conciliate so near and dangerous a neighbour as Ossory, which may have acknowledged the suzerainty of Cashel in the time of Cormac, and which Brian claimed as dependant. Ossory never yielded more than a forced and unwilling submission ; and though its rulers were not of the royal race Brían did not think well to push his demand as far as the exaction of tribute. If he constantly repeated the claim to sovereignty it was because it was never established. Leinster, in his desperate conflict with the Norse for the consolidation and protection of Leth Moga, proved his great and final difficulty. An old list of the twelve free and noble races of Ireland placed six in Conn's Half, among them the men of Leinster, and the other six in Mogh's Half [21]. Both the dynasties of Tara and Cashel claimed Leinster kings as vassals. Tara demanded tribute, Cashel preserved ancient memories in strange prerogatives surviving in the " Book of Rights," the right of a king of Munster to burn north Leinster ; or to go with a greyish host on Tuesday over the plain of Mag Ailbhe in that kingdom [22]. But the forced submission of both Ossory and Leinster was bitterly resented, and their resistance was powerfully backed by the Foreigners of Dublin and Waterford. These two states remained in effect outside Brían's settlement of Munster. After its great defeat in 999 Leinster was declared tributary, but where there was no law or ancient custom to give authority, Brían fixed no definite tribute, but merely stated that horses, drinking-horns, gold and riches from across the sea were due to Cashel. Even in his triumph he did reverence to the ancient teaching of the learned, admitting the opposition doctrine into the " Book of Rights" :

“ Though it is a good history on which I am engaged,
It is not taught by the Leinstermen,
It is not preserved by Conn's Half,
The history of Ailill Olom” [23].

A poem added to the " Book of Rights" consists of a list of strongholds of the kings of Cashel, scattered all over Munster and held at various times by its kings. It is possible that the inclusion of this list may indicate both the centralizing policy of Brían, and his attention to military defence by fortified posts throughout the province. It was well known that the Scandinavians, formidable in combat, had not the art of siege. We are told that not only did Brían strengthen the duns and islands and forts of Munster, but communications were restored by his bridges and causeways and high-roads.

It might seem that the Irish, whether for defence or for trade, were preparing to take their part with the Foreigners on the seas. In the " Book of Rights" we read of Irish " ships very

beautiful,” “ ships right beautiful,” a “ ship under full rigging,” “ the king of Cashel’s own befitting beauteous ship,” “ the Uí Briuin (descendants of great Niall’s brother) of the ships of the seas” [24]. The later saga of Cellachán boasted of Munstermen as having mastered the art of building the new ships where both oars and sails were used ; in which they traded in treasures from oversea, silken raiment, and abundance of wine. It tells of “ Munster of the great riches,” “ Munster of the swift ships.” An old poem recalls the wealth of the great maritime state [25] :

“ The Uí Eathach from Carn to Cork
High in beauty
Whose resolve is quiet prosperity.”

The panegyrist of Cellachán even credited the Irish with imitating the Scandinavian method of raising a navy by dividing the coast into districts, each of which had to equip and man ten ships to assemble at the summons for the united war-fleet—a method which even Brían Boru with his imperial vision must have rather desired than achieved. In the “ Wars of the Gaedhil and the Gaill” it is told that Brían sent forth a naval expedition composed not only of ships from Ath Cliath and Portlairge, but of the Uí Cennselach and the Uí Eachach or people of Cian on the southern coast ; a fleet to levy royal tribute along the coasts of Wales and Argyll. And “ Brían distributed all the tribute according to rights—a third part of it to the king of Ath Cliath ; and a third to the warriors of Leinster and of the Uí Eachach of Munster ; and another third to the professors of sciences and arts, and to every one who was most in need of it” [26]. In this record we see Brían’s first adventure in a national navy of Ireland, drawn from various peoples in a common enterprise for a common reward. It indicates the strength given to a united Munster by the added power of a long sea-line.

Like Charles the Great (every tradition of whose brilliant revival of learning and schools he must have known from Clonmacnois, where Colgu had been the correspondent of Alcuin) Brían’s care was the restoration of culture and civilization. All details are now obscured, awaiting new researches by Irish scholars ; but his purpose is clear—to restore national life after its ruin by the Foreigners, a life sustained by industry, art, learning and all spiritual influences. That he was deeply devout is certain. It is recorded that noble churches and their sanctuaries were built by him ; beginning it would seem in his home-land, if we may so interpret the scornful words attributed to warrior enemies confronting his despised people, “ Dál gCais of the churches” —or on the other hand the alleged boast of the court bard : “ the Dál gCais of the hundred churches” [27].

During the later ninth and the tenth centuries the emigration of learned men to Europe was no longer a missionary movement but a flight of refugees. A very imperfect indication of the devastating loss may be found in the notices by the Ulster Annals of the deaths of “ wise men” of special fame. From 801 to 886 twelve names are given—“ an excellent scribe,” “ the wisest of all the doctors of Europe,” “ the most learned of the Latinists of all Europe,” “ the most learned in all the histories of the Scoti,” “ no historian more excellent.” After a long gap (886-916), the years of supposed peace, the list begins again, a mere half-dozen for the tenth century, with a significant change of phrase—“ an eminent historian,” “ head of the learning of the island of Ireland,” “ the most learned of Ireland.” Schools had been wrecked, libraries utterly destroyed, and there is no indication of a single Latin work written in Ireland in the tenth century [28]. At the same time there can be no doubt of the inspiring force of a succession of jurists and historians, and poets who preserved the tradition of those most ancient songs in which the deeds of the kings of old and their wars were chanted. The remarkable collections first made by Kuno Meyer of poems, wise maxims, proverbs, laments, and spirit-

ual hymns and prayers in the tenth and eleventh centuries, give us the sense of an intensity of life and a literary wealth too long forgotten.

That these have been mostly gathered from Irish manuscripts carried oversea reveals the ruin of the old libraries, Brian's zeal was for the recovery of the essential civilization of his people. He "sent professors and masters to teach wisdom and knowledge ; and to buy books beyond the sea, and the great ocean ; because their writings and their books in every church and in every sanctuary where they were, were burned and thrown into water by the plunderers, from the beginning to the end ; and Brian himself gave the price of learning and the price of books to every one separately who went on this service." "I have not wealth of gold or silver," words given to him in his last dying hour at Clontarf, prove at least the popular sense of his lavish generosity in the effort to restore to his country the fulness of its life.

There may have been some new development in the schools, when the "fer léigind," first mentioned in the tenth century, appeared as head of the Latin school in Armagh and Slane, followed in the eleventh century by others in Kells and Monasterboice [29]. The remarkable work of the scribes in the eleventh century was doubtless due to the intellectual impulse given by Brian at this time. Dr. MacNeill and Mr. Robin Flower working on independent lines have come to the same conclusion, that it was probably through his energetic revival of learning from Kincora that the basin of the Shannon became the centre of literary activity where ancient traditions were preserved through later periods. It is not impossible that the famous bardic schools of the middle ages may have owed their life, after devastations of the pagan Foreigners, to the fostering care of Brian Boru. In a district stretching from Munster into Roscommon and Leitrim a long tradition of learning was maintained down to the fifteenth century, and in their schools was handed down an enormous proportion of the material now in existence. At Clonmacnois were compiled the Annals of Clonmacnois, the *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*, the important collection *Rawlinsin B. 502*, which contains the Annals of Tigernach. The Annals of Loch Cé were associated with Loch Key near the town of Boyle in Roscommon. The law-books that have been preserved were written in the school of the MacFirbis family : Dubhaltach MacFirbis, the last of that great line, compiled "Chronicon Scottorum" and the "Book of Genealogies." O'Davorens, MacEgans, Clancys, had all their origin in the same district. It was only slightly to the north in Maguire's country that the Annals of Ulster were written, and O'Gara the patron of the Four Masters lived on its borders on the banks of Loch Gara. Possibly some day competent scholars will render a sorely needed service to Ireland by a scientific exploration of the course of the Shannon, to recover every fragmentary trace left of the building of Brian, or of the new centres of learning established by him, and indicate how far he was in touch with the movement on the continent, and introduced new developments in Ireland.

REFERENCES

- [1] Our chief source for the history of Brian Boru is the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, or "War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill," the information in which appears to derive from a contemporary-witness, although the actual composition belongs to a later date. A fragment of this text occurs in the mid-twelfth century Book of Leinster, and it has been edited from that MS., from the Trinity College MS., H. 2, 17, and from a transcript by Michael O'Clery made in 1635, now preserved in the Royal Library, Brussels, by J. H. Todd, 1867. The events of Brian's rise to power in Munster are well related in Canon O'Mahony's "History of the O'Mahony Septs."
- [2] The Annals of Ulster do not say in the text that Brian was King of Ireland in 1003. This is in a note as having been interpolated by the translator of a particular MS. The following dates and facts are given in the Four Masters and not in the Ulster Annals : —

- 983. Took Gilla-Phadraig prisoner.
- 984. Plundered the west of Meath.
- 992. Hosting with the men of Munster and Connacht to Meath, took neither cow nor person, and went thence in secret flight.
- 993. Had a new fleet on Loch Ree and plundered the men of Bréifne.
- 994. Was routed by Mael Seachlinn.
- 1003. King of Ireland.

- [3] Eoin MacNeill : “ Phases of Irish History,” p. 268.
- [4] “ War of the Gaedhill and the Gaill,” pp. ciii, cxvi.
- [5] From Eachaid, somewhere about 500, came the name of the house—the Uí Eachaidh of Munster. See Canon O’Mahony’s “ History of the O’Mahony Septs of Kinelmeky and Ivaha,” pp. 18, 26.
- [6] “ History of the O’Mahony Septs,” pp. 11, 16.
- [7] *Ib.*, p. 15.
- [8] *Ib.*, pp. 28-29.
- [9] *Ib.*, pp. 30, 31.
- [10] “ War of the Gaedhil and the Gaill,” p. 59. For the late origin of the Eóganachta see “ Celtic Ireland,” p. 53, and “ Phases of Irish History,” pp. 126-127.
- [11] “ History of the O’Mahony Septs,” pp. 31 *seq.*
- [12] *Ib.*, pp. 31-32.
- [13] Annals of Ulster, 973.
- [14] “ War of the Gaedhil and the Gaill,” p. 97.
- [15] *Ib.*, pp. 97, 87.
- [16] “ Antiquities of Limerick and Neighbourhood.” (Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, Antiquarian Handbook Series No. VII.)
- [17] For Limerick trade see “ War of the Gaedhil and the Gaill,” p. 79.
- [18] “ History of the O’Mahony Septs,” pp. 37-39.
- [19] *Ib.*, p.41.
- [20] MacNeill : “ Celtic Ireland,” pp. 74-83. The modern barony of Corkaguiney retains the name of the Corcoidh Dhuighni, but the ancient district probably included the whole of the two great peninsulas of West Kerry from Kenmare to Tralee (p. 80).
- [21] *Ib.*, pp. 58, 59, 69, 70.
- [22] “ Book of Rights,” p. 5.
- [23] *Ib.*, pp. 57, 59.
- [24] *Ib.*, pp. 83, 85, 161, 107.
- [25] “ Cambrensis Eversus,” II, 779.
- [26] “ War of the Gaedhil and the Gaill,” p. 137.
- [27] *Ib.*, pp. 87, 101.
- [28] Gougaud : “ Les Chrétientés Celtiques,” p. 353.
- [29] MacNeill : “ Phases of Irish History,” p. 285.

History of the Irish state to 1014 (1925)

Author : Green, Alice Stopford, 1848-1929

Publisher : London : Macmillan

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : National Library of Scotland

Book contributor : National Library of Scotland

Collection : nationallibraryofscotland

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/historyofirishst00gree>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

April 18 2011