



The Death of Brian Boru

April 23rd 1014AD

Clontarf, Dublin, Ireland

Located four miles north of Dublin City Centre, Ireland and now a modern suburb of Metropolitan Dublin. A thousand years ago in 1014 Clontarf was a small fishing weir village

"To show the world that Brian wished not that his race and name should survive the liberties of their country, every member of his family who were males attended his standard- his five sons, his grandson, his fifteen nephews, and the whole body of the Dalcassion Knights, together with all the chiefs of North Munster. South Munster, also unanimously gathered around the Royal standard of Brian, not one absenting himself from the muster. The great steward of Lennox, the great steward of Mar, and many other Scottish Chiefs, repaired also to the Army of Brian.

THE MARCH INTO LEINSTER

Surrounded by his Dalcassion Knights, Brian marched into Leinster at the head of about thirty thousand men in the beginning of April 1014, in three divisions, and was there joined by Malachy II., King of Meath. He encamped, as he had done the year before, in the war against Maelmordha, near Kilmainham. After both armies had viewed each other it was agreed to determine the fate of Ireland by a general battle on the plain of Clontarf. Brian offered the Danes battle on Palm Sunday, which they declined; but on Good Friday, they signified, by their dispositions, that they were about to open their attack.

Brian felt much grieved that a day so sacred to the Christians should have been destined for the work of death; but with dauntless spirit and a calm and confident exterior he issued orders for arranging his troops in order for battle.

THE ARMIES OF IRELAND

The right wing of the Irish Army was composed of the Dalcassion knights, the household troops of Ireland, heroic defenders of race and religion in that age, worthy successors of the ancient knights of former ages and worthy predecessors of the *Ancient Order Of Hibernians* of our own age. Next to the Dalcassion knights were the nobility of Munster, and Malachy, with all the forces of Meath. This wing was to be commanded by Brian's son, Murrough, and by the Prince of Ulster. In the left wing were the troops of the king of Connacht **Tadhg Mor O'Kelly**; in the center of this wing were the Knights of Connacht made up of warriors of the **O'Kelly Clann of Ui Maine**, the Damnonians, and on one side of them were several detachments from the troops of Arra, Coonach, Muscry, and Cora-Baisgne. The troops of South Munster, under their different chiefs, with those of the Deasies, formed the central division, were commanded by Cinn, the son of Maolmuadh, of the royal house of South Munster. Their ranks had been formed before daylight, and as the sun rose, Brian rode through the lines of his soldiers with a crucifix in one hand, and a drawn sword in the other; he reminded them of the day selected by the pagan invader to offer battle, and exhorted them to conquer or die. Standing in the centre of his army, and raising his powerful voice, his speech was worthy of

so great a king and so good a man: "Be not dismayed my soldiers, because my son Donough is avenging our wrongs in Leinster; he will return victorious, and in the glory of his conquests you shall share. On your valor rests the hopes of your country today; and what surer grounds can they rest upon? Oppression now attempts to bend you down to servility; will you burst its chains and rise to the independence of Irish freemen? Your cause is one approved by Heaven. You seek not the oppression of others; you fight for your country and sacred altars. It is a cause that claims heavenly protection. In this day's battle the interposition of that God who can give victory will be signally manifested in your favor. Let every heart, then, be the throne of confidence and courage. You know that the Danes are strangers to religion and humanity; they are inflamed with the desire of violating the fairest daughters of this land of beauty, and enriching themselves with the spoils of sacrilege and plunder. The barbarians have impiously fixed, for their struggle, to enslave us, upon the very day on which the Redeemer of the world was crucified. Victory they shall not have! from such brave soldiers as you they can never wrest it; for you fight in defense of honor, liberty and religion-in defense of the sacred temples of the true God, and of your sisters, wives and daughters. Such a holy cause must be the cause of God, who will deliver your enemies this day into your hands. Onward, then, for your country and your sacred altars!" (From Annals of Innisfallen, Mooney, p436).

The brave and dauntless old king then held out his vigil crucifix in one hand and waved his gold-hilted sword with the other, signifying that he was willing and ready to die for the cause of Christianity and his native Ireland. He proceeded, amidst the wild shouts of his troops, towards the Dalcassians to take his station in the midst of them and lead the advance, when all the chiefs interposed, and implored him, on account of his great age to retire to his tent and leave the command to his son, the valiant and skillful Murrough. Although bent with the weight of eighty-eight years of toil and covered with the scars of a hundred battles, the courageous old man protested that he was fit for command; but at last unwillingly allowed himself to be conducted to his tent.

The Irish army then called on their chiefs to lead them to the fight; the intrepid Dalcassians, the body-guard of Brian, raised the sunburst standard of Fingal- the "Gall-Greana," or "blazing sun," marked with arms of O'Brian, the hand and sword, bearing the inscription "Victory or Death." At eight in the morning the Dalcassians led the way with the right wing to attack, sword in hand, all dismounted, for the ditches in front of the Danish position prevented the charge of horse. At this moment the Meath legions retired suddenly from the field, leaving the Dalcassians exposed from the far superior number of the enemy's left wing. But Murrough, with great presence of mind, cried out to his Dalcassians: "that this was the time to win fame, for the greater the enemy the greater the glory!" And now the right was closely engaged with battle-axe and sword, spear and dagger, the left, under the command of the king of Connacht, with his Damnonian knights, hastened to engage the Danes of Leinster and their foreign auxiliaries while the troops of South Munster, with the Eoganachts, attacked the apostate Maolmordha and his degenerate subjects.

(For only reasons of typing it all, I will omit. for now the details of the battle. Suffice to say that Murrough lifted the standard of Fingal, and waving it yelled " Before the hour's end this standard will float over the Danish camp, or over my dead body!" The other chiefs were enriched again with vigor, and charged again the Danes.....Thrown into confusion and panic, ranks broken the fled pursued to their ships by the victorious Irish... writes a spectator in the "Chronicum Scotorum.."I have never, beheld with my eyes, nor read in history, a sharper bloodier fight than this")

The right arm of Murrough, swollen with the enormous exertions of his valor, forced him to halt beside a brook to bathe it with cool water. at that moment a straggling party of Danes, who were retreating from the field, accidentally came near, and one of them, a chief named Anrud, set upon him. But Murrough, though not able to raise his right arm, with a trip, prostrated him upon the dirt, and with his left arm actually dragged his coat of mail over his head, place the point of his sword on the Danes body, and, leaning on it with his own body, drove it through his enemy. While Murrough was so stooped over his foe the Dane snatched a scimitar from Murrough's girdle and plunged it into the breast near the heart of the brave son of Brian. The Dane immediately expired, and Murrough lingered until the following day, receiving all the rites and consolations of religion before his valiant spirit took its flight from earth.

This prince has been called the "Ajax of Clontarf," and truly he was the mould of an heroic age. according to the Munster Book of Battles, Prince Murrough was buried in the west end of a chapel in the cemetery of Kilmainham.

Over his remains was placed a lofty stone cross on which his name was engraved. {Note: This cross fell from its pedestal in 1798. Under the base were found Danish coins and a fine sword in a good state of preservation, supposed to be that which the prince Murrough used at the battle of Clontarf. In 1843 this sword hung in the headquarters of the commander-of-the forces at Kilmainham}

Corcoran, one of the marshals of Brian, was the first to fly to the tent of the monarch with the intelligence of the death of his son Murrough. He found Brian kneeling before a crucifix; and the heroic old warrior, on hearing the sad news, though that the battle had been one by the Danes, and instantly said: "Do you, and the other chiefs fly to Armagh, and communicate my will to the successor of *St. Patrick*. But as for me, I came here to conquer or die, and the enemy shall not boast that I fell by inglorious wounds." At this instant, Brodar, The Dane, with a small party, rushing in their despair towards a small wood near which Brian's tent was erected, resolved, in the madness of his desperate rage, to be avenged for the defeat of his countrymen by killing the king of Ireland. The aged but heroic Brian, seeing them rush into the tent, seized his great two-handed sword, and with one blow, cut off the legs of the first Dane that entered. Brodar, entering next, struck Brian on the back of his head with his axe; but in spite of the stunning wound, Brian, with all the might strength for which he was renowned, by a fortunate stroke, cut off the head of Broder, and killed the third Dane that attacked him; and then calmly resigned himself to death. Thus, in the eighty-eighth year of his age, in the midst of conquest, fell one of the bravest, wisest, and noblest of all the kings of Ireland, whose reign exhibits the most splendid display of glory in all the annals of his country. His long life is a jewel which his country will wear forever, irradiating his glory upon the humblest of her sons.....The Danes were pursued to their ships, Dublin was captured.....It is said that the army of Brian set fire to houses long into the night so that they would have light by which to discover the fleeing enemy.....

The remains of Brian were conveyed to Armagh by the whole army. With Brian, some accounts say, went also the bodies of Murrough, Conaing, and Moltha; and that their obsequies were celebrated for twelve days by the clergy of Armagh, after which the body of Brian was deposited in a stone coffin on the north side of the high altar in the great cathedral, the body of Murrough, it is said, being interred on the south side of the church. The remains of Turlough, and several other chieftains, were buried in the old churchyard of Kilmainham, known afterwards as "Bully's Acre," where the shaft of an ancient Irish cross still, it is said, marks the spot."

And thus the end of Irelands Most beloved sons.

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