

everywhere, even in their law-books, inseparable from their thoughts, their speech, and their every-day actions. Music was the handmaid of poetry, which was composed in such a way as to be played or sung. All the Irish Celts possessed harps, and these were found in every home and at every gathering. Song, festivity, humor ruled more universally in Ireland than in any other Celtic nation.

Cormac Mac Art, grandson of Con of the Hundred Battles, was the wisest of Ireland's early kings. Under him flourished the great military organisation called the "Fiannas," or "Braves," whose chief leader was Fium Mac Cumhail. Cormac himself, though he fought in many battles, made himself illustrious by the arts of peace. Two works of his come down to us—*The Brehan Laws and Instruction for a King*, written to preserve manners, morals, and good government in the kingdom.

In religious matters the Celts of Ireland were pagans, but the gross idolatry of the Celts of Gaul never prevailed amongst them. Excavations and researches have never resulted in the discovery of the statue of a god, or of any other pagan sign. The ancient Irish possessed no mythology except harmless fairy tales, and no poetical histories of gods or goddesses—indeed, the probability is that they were not idolaters. Their priests or Druids, eminently learned men, were certainly monotheists, recognising the existence of one supreme being. As soon as Christianity was preached to the Irish, they rushed to a life of perfection. Even St. Patrick was surprised at their ardor. "The sons of Irishmen," he says, "and the daughters of their chieftains want to become monks and virgins of Christ."

Tradition tells of invasions or colonisations of Eire, and traces them all back to an origin in the Mediterranean. Partholon and Nemed are said to have been the first two colonies, but part of the Nemedian colony returned to the Mediterranean and served as slaves. They were set to work to carry earth in wallets to enrich the slopes of the vineyards; hence they were called "Firbolgs" or "Men of the leathern wallets." Forty years later came a new body of invaders, the Tuatha de Danaan. They also were of the Nemedian race and had learnt magic from the Greeks. When Syria overran Greece, they fled to Norway and thence to Ireland. Some 200 years later came the Milesians, who defeated the magic-working de Danaans and took possession of the country.

We have said that the Irish were not builders of cities; they were builders, nevertheless, and have left behind them many wonderful monuments. In Brugh na Boinne, the burying-place of the pagan Irish kings, are still to be seen the remains of vast sepulchres, and at Carrowmore is found a group of stone circles that has no parallel in the British Isles. The whole country is dotted over with rath and liss, cahir and cairn. The mansions of the chieftains were "raths" used for dwellings, and "duns" constructed with a view to resisting attacks. These raths and duns were in part under ground and in part above, circular in form, built sometimes of stones, more often of sodded clay. The ruins of these are now being explored, and relics are being exhumed, which show that real objects of art embellished the dwellings of Irishmen, probably before the foundation of Rome and while Greece was yet in a state of barbarism.

Such was the golden age of pre-Christian Ireland—"Ireland, Queen of the Western Seas, Long has been the hour of thine unquenching.

And the just understand that thine hour is at hand, Thine hour at hand, with power in the dawning."

First Prize Essay (Junior Section), by WILLIAM HERLIHY, St. Joseph's School, Dannevirke (age 11 years).

THE BATTLE OF CLONTARF.

The Battle of Clontarf was fought in the year 1014, when Brian Boru was King of Ireland. The contesting parties were the Danes and the Irish. These

Danes, or Northmen as they were called, came from Norway and Denmark, from the Orkney and Shetland Isles, from Northumbria and Man, and from Cantyre and Cornwall. Their two best-known leaders were Brodir, of Man, and Sigurd, Earl of Orkneys. The Irish leader was their king, Brian Boru.

Clontarf stretches from the crescent-shaped north strand of Dublin harbor towards the promontory of Howth. The meadow-land between slopes gently upward and inward from the beach, and for the myriad duels which formed the ancient battle no field could present less possible vantage ground to the combatants on either side.

On the 18th of April, 1014, the great Danish fleet arrived in Dublin Bay. Most of the galleys anchored in the bay, some were moored in the mouth of the river Liffey, while the rest were beached or anchored in a vast line stretching along the Clontarf shore.

In the meantime one of the princes of Leinster had deserted to the Danish side, and was so eager to help them that he took all his followers with him. On hearing this Brian secretly dispatched a body of soldiers to raid the traitor's territory. This news was carried by a spy to the Danish camp, and the traitor urged Brodir that now was the time to attack, as Brian's best troops were away. Accordingly, on Holy Thursday the Danes announced that they would fight on the morrow. Brian did not wish to engage in battle on that day, which would be Good Friday, that awful anniversary when the altars of the Church are veiled throughout Christendom, and the dark stone is rolled to the door of the mystic sepulchre.

The Danish left wing consisted of the Dublin Danes and one thousand men in coats of mail commanded by the youthful princes, Arnud and Carlus. In the centre, Maelmorra, the traitor prince, commanded the Leinster men, while on the right the foreign Danes were under Brodir and Sigurd. Facing the Dublin Danes on the Irish right were the Dalcassians under Murrogh, Brian's son. In the centre were the men from Munster under Cian and Domhnall, while on the left were the Connaught men under O'Heine and O'Kelly.

Before the battle, Brian, mounted on his battle charger, and with a cross in his hand, rode in front and solemnly addressed the army. He told them to "remember that on this day Christ died for us on the Mount of Calvary"; he told them also to remember all the Danes had done, and that in fighting them they fought for their country and their faith and that God would be with them in the fight. Inspired by these words his army rushed upon the foe. It was Good Friday, the 23rd April, 1014, just as the tide was at its full. There was no cavalry in either army, nor can we discern any system of tactics by which masses of men make or resist an attack. The battle was rather a series of single combats in which personal prowess was the deciding element. It was a fiercely contested fight. Morning passed into mid-day and mid-day into evening, but still the battle raged. Standards had fallen, the ranks were fatally thinned, and the ground was covered with dead and dying men; yet neither side would give way, and even as the sun descended Celt and Dane still faced each other in that grim death struggle.

On the left O'Kelly and O'Heine, with many a gallant Connaught man were dead, and the great Sigurd himself was with the slain. On the right the slaughter was great, for in no part of the battle had the contest been waged more fiercely. The dead lay in heaps, and on the blood-soddened fields the mail-clad Norwegian and the hardy veteran from the Fergus and the Shannon, after their fierce encounter, together peacefully in death.

After Brian Boru's famous address to his army, at the entreaty of his friends he retired to his tent, which stood at some distance, and was there guarded by three of his aides. Here he alternately prostrated himself before the crucifix or looked out from the tent door upon the dreadful scene that lay beyond. Towards sunset one division of the enemy under Brodir was retreating, when Brodir, perceiving the tent of Brian standing apart without any guard and the aged king on his knees before the crucifix, rushed in, cut him

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