



Fiannaíocht – Brian Boru, High King of Ireland

Leaders Note

This has inspired by the historical accounts of the deeds of Brian Boru

This story has been rewritten for macaoimh and it can be read directly.

The Story of Brian Boru – High King of Ireland

By Ann Connell

A feeble, grey-haired old man sat alone at the entrance to his tent. Below him he could see the bloody battlefield: He couldn't see it too clearly, his eyesight wasn't what it used to be; but his hearing was as sharp as ever. He could hear the rhythmic drumbeat and the soft air of the pipers carrying on the wind, but the thumping echo of sword and shield was what appealed most to this now ancient Celtic warrior. If only he was younger, ah, those were the days...

He remembered a young boy hunting and fishing at Kincora. He remembered learning to fight. The happiest day of his youth was when his older brother, the chieftain of Dal Cais, gave him a sword and shield of his own. His skills as a warrior improved daily as the months passed he grew in strength and understanding of his duties. Within a few years he was ready to stand at his brother's side against the Vikings at Limerick. It was his first fight and it was a glorious one, the enemy with their horned helmets and barbaric ways, were soon defeated by the superior armies of Dal Cais. Brian had wielded his sword bravely in defense of his home and won the admiration of many. His popularity grew and it came as no surprise when he won the throne of Cashel and became King of Munster. Brian Boru was a popular king; he was just and wise. The chieftains of Munster supported him and the province prospered.

But Brian wasn't happy; he was worried about the other provinces too. Not only were the Viking invaders establishing strongholds, building towns and annihilating the Irish wherever they went but the chieftains were doing nothing about it. They were too taken up with their selfish, petty squabbles. Even now, years later, the old king shook with anger when he thought about it. Well if they weren't going to do something about it, Brian Boru, King of Munster certainly wasn't going to stand idly by.

Brian summoned his own chieftains. He sent messengers to Malachy and the stronger chieftains of Connacht, Ulster and Leinster. He would make them see sense; they were wasting their time and energy fighting with each other instead of uniting- against the pagan invaders. And, indeed, he did make them see sense. In fact, when they listened to Brian's wisdom, many of Malachy's chieftains asked to join ranks with Brian. Malachy also decided to unite his clans against the Vikings. For the next few years, things started to go well, Brian kept the Vikings at bay in the southern half of the country and Malachy's efforts in the northern half were also very successful. The Vikings were driven back to Dublin, it was their only stronghold and as time passed they seemed to settle down and become more peaceful. Brian was much happier; all the kingdoms of Ireland were safe again. The chieftains had united under Brian and Malachy and the whole country had benefited.

Then one day a messenger arrived at Cashel with the unhappy news that the High King was dying. Without delay, Brian gathered together a few close friends and some servants. Off they went to Tara to pay their respects to Malachy, their High King, their comrade at arms and their friend. When they reached Tara, Brian went straight to Malachy's bedside; The old man was as pale as the sheets he lay in, his breathing was slow and painful and Brian could see there was very little life left in him. That evening was Malachy's last in this world. Prayers were uttered in every household throughout the country as news of the High Kings passing spread. Church bells tolled solemnly as priests offered Masses for the repose of his soul. The following week was distressing as the country mourned the passing of a good and noble king, but as always the living had to return to everyday life and soon people were much more likely to wonder about a new High King than to reminisce about Malachy.

Brian was indeed the obvious choice. All the chieftains realised that if it hadn't been for Brian's wisdom they would never have united to keep the Vikings under control. Needless to say, he was honoured to accept his place on the throne of Tara. "Brian Boru, High King of Ireland", he liked the sound of that... He had always dreamed of that day, but never had he actually believed it would happen. It didn't take him long to settle into his new home in Tara, and before long it seemed to everyone as if



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Brian had always been High King, it seemed to come so naturally to him.

Ah, those were certainly the good old days, thought the feeble grey-haired old man as he surveyed the battlefield below. His life had seen and brought many changes to Ireland of which he was very proud: It was a great pity that the peace and prosperity of those earlier days of his reign had once again erupted into bloodshed and on Good Friday of all days. Had those barbarian Vikings no respect, even for God Almighty? But maybe the timing was somewhat appropriate, maybe Christianity and goodness would win on this Good Friday on the battlefield of Clontarf as had happened that very first Easter over a thousand years before on the hill of Calvary.

Well, if that hoard of Vikings thought they could outdo Brian and his warriors they certainly had another thing coming to them. Never since the days of Fionn MacCumhail had any Irish army been so strong, well trained or united as the Brian's forces were. His thoughts were interrupted by the unmistakable victory cries of his forces. The drumbeat had quickened, the pipes now sang a more lilting tune, and shouts of "Eire Go Deo" filled the air. Brian smiled; he strained his eyes and could just about see the Viking survivors running in all directions, scared and confused by such quick defeat. It wouldn't be long before his sons and the other chieftains arrived at his tent to tell him of their glorious victory, naturally it would be tinged with sadness too. Brian had learned long ago that even the quickest of battles brought tragic losses. He had seen many good friends fall to enemy blows in the past and he couldn't help wondering which of his brave comrades would he mourn tonight.

Meanwhile, in a little oak wood just yards from Brian's tent, three escaping cowards paused to catch their breath. They had been so sure of their power and strength, but now they panted in terror as the realisation of their defeat sank in. Yes, they had been overwhelmingly defeated; they were terrified that soon they would meet that same bloody fate that had befallen so many of their gathering. Retaliation seemed out of the question, most of their ranks were lying dead or dying on the battlefield below.

Suddenly, one of the three noticed Brian's tent just a few yards away. "Hey, isn't that the banner of their

High King?", he asked. The others looked, they nodded, then, malicious smirks of revenge slowly crept across their faces. "I knew the old man wouldn't be contented to stay at Tara, and miss the excitement of battle", one of them grinned.

Within seconds, they were conspiring in a strange tongue. Their plan agreed; they stole towards the unguarded tent. One went left, the second right and the third raised his dagger and slashed through the back of the tent.

Inside the tent, Brian knelt in prayer for the souls of those who had died to bring this victory. He thanked God for allowing such an old man as he, to live to see this day. Just then his ears drew his attention to a noise outside. He started to get to his feet to welcome his sons and the other chieftains, but before he straightened his second knee, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He just managed to turn his head in time to see his assailant raise a dagger to his throat. Brian let out a scream but that only served to invite in the other attackers. It was a cruel and brutal attack. Brian had no chance at all. The three vengeful heathens dropped their weapons and fled through the back of the tent as they heard a party of Irishmen coming towards them. They did not escape. Brian's sons ran to his side, their father lay in a pool of blood. Even though he was still breathing, they knew he would not survive more than a few minutes. Sensing their presence, Brian looked up at them; he smiled, whispered that they had done well, and breathed his last.

Brian Boru, High King of Ireland, died at Clontarf in Co. Dublin on Good Friday, 1014.