

SIR JOHN THOMAS BANKS.

Sir John Thomas Banks, Physician, was the twenty-fourth child of Percival Banks, who was also a doctor with a good practice in Ennis, and of Mary Ramsey. Banks was born on 14th October, 1815, and entered Trinity College, Dublin, at the age of 17. He graduated from there B.A., and M.B., in 1837, and M.D. in 1843.

In the meantime, he had entered the Royal College of Surgeons and, after several years apprenticeship under the famous physician, Sir Henry Marsh, he obtained his doctor's licence in the year 1836. In 1841 he became a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, and, in 1844, a Fellow of the same College.

After such a brilliant educational career, Banks very soon established a large practice in Dublin and, in addition, there was hardly a hospital in the city in which he did not hold some sort of position as consultant. He was President of the College of Physicians in 1869 and President of the British Medical Association in 1887, on the occasion of their general meeting in Dublin. Without danger of contradiction, it may be said that Banks was the most eminent Irish physician of his day.

He was the recognised authority on typhus as well as diseases of the brain and, in his younger days, he had done much clever research work into these two subjects. His busy life, however, left him little time for scientific research, and it is on his practice that Banks' reputation now rests.

In 1848 he married Alicia Wright, of Monaghan, and had an only child, Mary. In 1883 he declined a knighthood, but, in 1889, accepted the far greater honour of K.C.B. Banks lived to be a very old man and, although his eyesight failed him in his last few years, it did not interfere either with his practice or his social activities. He died at 45, Merrion Square, Dublin, on 16th July, 1908, aged 93, and was buried in Mount Jerome Cemetery.

A portrait of him, painted by Sarah Purser, now hangs in the Hall of the Royal College of Physicians. Another portrait, designed by Oliver Shepherd, for a medal to be awarded to the winner of the travelling scholarship in medicine in Trinity College is in that College.

BRIAN BORU, High King of Ireland.

Brian Boru, High King of Ireland, was born in the first half of the tenth century, about the year 926. He was the son of Kennedy the Pure, of the Dalcassian Race, and in the sketch of his elder brother, Mahon, we have already described his early exploits. When Mahon was slain in 976, Brian assumed the Kingship of Munster and quickly avenged his brother's death.

Maolmuadh, Mahon's slayer, was killed at the battle of Belach Lechta in 979. Ivar the Dane, one of the conspirators against Mahon, was slain shortly after, and all his islands and forts at the estuary of the Fergus destroyed; and, finally, the territory of the Ui Fidhgheanta in West Limerick was plundered and their King Donovan, put to death.

Brian then went into Waterford and Leinster and subdued the kings there, making himself undisputed ruler of the whole Southern half of Ireland. He then collected a huge fleet and, sailing up the Shannon into Lough Ree, imposed his rule on the lords of Meath, Breifne and Connaught. In 998, he was recognised as King of Leath Mogh by Maolshechlainn, High King of Ireland, who gave him in recognition all the hostages and tributes of Leinster, Dublin and Connaught. The Northmen of Dublin and the Leinstermen conspired and revolted against Brian, but the latter inflicted a crushing defeat on them at Glenmama in the Wicklow Hills. Following up his victory, he raided Dublin, burned it to the ground and took off much plunder to Kincora. The prestige gained by Brian by his defeat of the hitherto invincible Dubliners was too much for the High King, who, without any fight, resigned in Brian's favour.

Brian, of course, made the usual circuit of the High King, exacting respect, tributes and hostages wherever he went. His rule was strict and just, and although it cannot be truly said that the country was really at peace, it undoubtedly was, for the first and last time, really united under one powerful ruler. It has been called the Golden Age of Ireland.

Eventually, the Northmen and the Leinstermen again revolted against Brian's rule and assembled in force to march against Brian. They received help from their fellow-Northmen from as far North as Norway itself, but Brian, with the assistance of many of the Irish tribes, marched undauntedly against them. The two armies clashed just outside Dublin, on the plains of Clontarf, where the river Tolka flows into Dublin Bay, on Good Friday, 23rd April, 1014. The fight was long and bloody, but eventually the Northmen broke rank and were completely routed. It was the final smashing for ever of the power of the Northmen in Ireland, but the cost paid by the Dalcassians was an expensive one. Brian himself, now an old man, was killed in his tent by an escaping Northman. Murcadh, his son, and Turlough, his son, as well as most of the Dalcassian chieftains were also slain. If the power of the Northmen was smashed, the might of the Dalcassians, or as they were soon to be called, the Ui Briain, was left so weak that they never again attained the eminence they gained during Brian's lifetime. In spite of this, the battle of Clontarf deserves its reputation as the most decisive battle in Irish history, and Brian Boru the honour he has won, as our greatest leader of all time.