

## REVIEW.

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"KING BRIAN : THE HERO OF CLONTARF."

By T. J. WESTROPP.

(Dublin—The Talbot Press, 89 Talbot Street.)

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Amongst the many references to Clontarf, and historical sketches of Brian of the Tribute, which mark the present anniversary of that famous battle, not the least interesting is this pamphlet by a valued member of our Society, Mr. T. J. Westropp, reprinted from the *Irish Monthly*. In a country like ours, where the study of history has been so neglected, in fact, to an extent banned by the education authorities, it is natural to expect the public to have somewhat of an open mind on the character of Brian, and his place in history. Some recent writers on this subject have taken different views of Brian and his policy. The author of this sketch sees in him a great Dalcassian, a fine fighter, a truly noble man; and perhaps this is as far as friendly sympathy could lead us. Time has dealt kindly with his faults, and that esteem in which he was held by his own people, and even by his enemies, appears to live on through the pages of history.

It is possible that Brian, desirous of following the example of Alfred, Charlemagne, Otho, and other Christian monarchs, hoped to establish an hereditary monarchy in Ireland, and that his life-long policy, of conflict and alliances with the Northmen and the Irish tribes, was directed to that end. If that were so, then Clontarf cannot be considered a triumph, but it is probable that the raids and exactions of the Northmen of Munster on the Dal Cais, against which Brian's earliest attacks were directed, led to his seeing the necessity of making a supreme effort to cripple the power of the foreigner in Ireland. In this he succeeded, and the battlefield of Clontarf marks a splendid victory. It is doubtful



if Brian ambitioned more. To subdue the warring tribes of Ireland, and reign peacefully over a united kingdom, was an ideal which few could hope to realize, though he was prepared to hold the possession of High King by force of arms.

Brian's policy and hopes and fears are for the critical historian to analyze, Mr. Westropp does not attempt it. He has provided a concise history of the Dal Cais, and of the troubles that led up to the battle of Clontarf, with an interesting description of the battle. The local legends of King Brian are dealt with in an interesting chapter, to which Mr. Westropp's intimate knowledge of the district lends a special interest.

A study of the history of this period from all sources will help to remove many popular fallacies regarding the Danes. As Mr. Westropp notes, the fact that Mungret Abbey reached its highest fame as a centre of learning during the period of the Norse occupation of Limerick (about 900 A.D.) affords food for reflection.

P. J. L.

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