

On the rapids of the Shannon, near Killaloe, few vestiges remain of Kincora, where the kings of the Dalcassians had their seats of power. Here it was, in the great hall of the royal fort, that Mahon and Brian, princes of North Munster, gave defiance to the envoys from Danish Limerick. Here were organized the hostings that routed the Danes, with slaughter, at Solloghead, driving them from Limerick and Iniscathy. Here Brian thought and schemed and worked for the good of Eire. Here he called the muster of the clans of Connaught and Munster, with Gaels from the west of Scotland, and Christianized Norsemen from the Isle of Man, which swept the great host of the pagan Danes into the sea at Clontarf, on the memorable Good Friday of the year 1014.

As, on the day before Clontarf, Donnchadh, son of Brian, passed south from Kilmainham with a battalion of the Dalcassians to ravage traitorous Leinster, which had leagued with the Danes, he must have seen far off in the Meath distance the abandoned fort of the kings of Ireland on Tara. Chiefs of the Fir Bholg or Tuatha Dé Danann races buildied that fort centuries ere Christ was born. From out its gateways rode the high kings and the hosts of the high kings on their way to force the tribute from recalcitrant provinces, or spread the terror of the Irish name throughout the close-lying Roman dominions of Britain and Gaul. In one of its walls, after he had fallen in battle against Leinster, clansmen placed the body of the High King Laoghaire, he that saw Patrick light the fire of the faith in Eire. In his war-gear he died, and in his war-gear they left him, helmeted and sworded, standing erect in his walled tomb, facing to the south, fronting Leinster, unseeing, implacable eyes turned in death on the foe.

Ireland's first Christian king was also the greatest of those who preceded Malachy and Brian. He was Dermot MacCarroll, who reigned in Tara in the sixth century. Long before the time of Brian he conceived the idea of a strong central government, which should consolidate the warring clans as one nation. It was a magnificent and statesmanlike idea, and he strove manfully to carry it into effect. But at every turn his schemes were thwarted by those who should have been his natural auxiliaries. The sub-kings brooked exceedingly ill, if at all, his attempts to curtail their excess of authority, which encroached on the rights of the central power and the laws of the state. Ecclesiastics also came in collision with the high king in his efforts to strengthen the nation. He rendered a