

NOTES

" Niamh "

Not so well known as *Seadna*, which is Canon O'Leary's masterpiece, *Niamh* is a historical novel of the time when Brian drove the Danes out of Ireland. It is a book of intense interest. The characterisation is vivid and the story is told with an artistic simplicity that makes one sorry that the great Gaelic scholar, Peadar Ua Laoghaire, did not devote himself to writing at an earlier age. When reading the account of the preparations before the Battle of Clontarf, one cannot help thinking how the spirit of the marching men of those brave old days resembled that of Sinn Fein at the present time. When the armies came, converging on Cille Maighneann, from the distant parts of Ireland, winding along the broad highways which Brian with wonderful foresight had made suitable for military roads, and men prayed as they went. And on the hills along the routes the old men and the old women and the children gathered to watch the march and they too prayed long after the waving banners had passed from view. With the marching men were their chiefs, young and old, priests and monks to lead the prayers, and young women to nurse the wounded and care the sick when the fight was over. And the spirit of the fighting men was this: as they went along the Irish roads what they were saying to one another was that they would never come back alive if they did not drive the invader out of Ireland; for, said they, is it not better be dead than living as slaves under the yoke of the tyrant? And what the fighting men were saying the women and the old people were all saying too; for, one and all, they loved Ireland and loved their faith too dearly to desire to live and see the one plundered and the other outraged by foreign hordes. If you think about it you will find that in Ireland to-day the very same spirit exists. The people are all praying to God for peace with honor; the women and the old people are as determined as the fighting men; and what one and all are saying is that it is better to fight on to death rather than live to see the oppression of Ireland continued. Under Brian a united people won. Under de Valera a united people are winning once more. For no power can beat a determined and united nation. That is the message we get from *Niamh*.

Brian as a Model King

Before undertaking his great and final campaign Brian went on a visit to the different courts of Erin, in order to secure the united co-operation of all available forces for the coming fight. Wherever he went he paid particular attention to the condition of the Church. His first care on arriving at a court was to visit the Blessed Sacrament and then to see that the material buildings and the vestments and the ornaments of the sanctuary were a credit to religion. He also inspected the monasteries and inquired into their spirit. He went to every convent, believing it the duty of the High King of Erin to pay special honor to the devoted nuns whose prayers were always with him. Better than modern rulers he knew the value of religious training for the young. Kings and rulers of our time blindly undermine their own power by encouraging schools which teach the people to disregard all authority and to have little or no respect for virtue. Brian, being, unlike modern rulers, a Christian gentleman as well as a King, knew the worth of the faith, and both by word and example inculcated on teachers the necessity of making it the foundation of education. In *Niamh* we read: *Bhí fhios ag Brian go maith, agus an uile dhuine des na h-oidiv a bhí ag stiurughadh na h-aibre sin, na fuil ach diabhal o ifrean sa bhfear a geobhaidh sgoilighcheacht gan Creideamh.*—"Brian knew well, and every teacher carrying on the work knew that there was but infernal evil in the person who was edu-

cated without the faith." How right he was later history proved. Only religion and love of country enable the Irish to-day to stand so fearlessly before the armed gaol-birds and assassins hired by England to crush them.

Instinct or Reason

The readers of cheap R.P.A. prints who follow blindly in the footsteps of the forger, Haeckel, and his sciolist translator, McCabe, would lower themselves to the level of the brute and deny the existence of the soul with its spiritual power of intelligence. It does not matter to them that Science is against them; they will not believe the Bible but they regard a forger as infallible, and the wild assertions of illiterate scribes who write anonymously for socialist papers are all the proof they want. Here is an extract giving the opinion of one of the greatest authorities on the long-debated problem: Do insects (and the lower animals in general) display intelligence or merely blind instinct? And if the latter be true how can man's reason have been evolved from animal instinct?

Fabre takes the most striking habits of insects and observes them with minute care; or he quotes alleged proofs of reasoning power and subjects the same actions to ingenious experiment. In all cases he shows that the apparent intelligence is nothing but instinct, wondrously adapted to the normal life of the animal, but blind and unreasoning when abnormal conditions are introduced. As a simple instance, take the case of the Processionary Moth. Its little caterpillars, which nest on the pine-tops, sally forth at night to browse on the pine needles. In single file they march, and each as he goes spins a silky thread. Arrived at their food they disperse to eat it, and when satiated each easily recovers his own or one of the neighboring threads; thus one by one they line up on the common ribbon and return to their nest as safely as Theseus guided by Ariadne's clue. On these wanderers, thus bound to home by a silken tie, Fabre played a sad trick. He succeeded in getting them to go round the edge of a large palm-pot, and brushed away all clues leading to the nest. Round and round the pot went the procession, and it was not till eight days had passed that, faint and weary, some at last dropped to the ground, leaving threads which guided the others down the pot. They had marched 453 metres.

The Burying Beetles have acquired a reputation for logic. It does not survive the logic of Fabre. One story tells how a beetle, finding a dead mouse on hard ground, dug a grave in looser soil some way off and then fetched four other beetles to help him in moving and burying the body. Fabre, on the other hand, found that it took three beetles no less than six hours to shift a mouse off a brick on to practicable soil, and that, though help was close at hand, they summoned no others to their aid. Another naturalist relates how some beetles, observing a frog impaled out of reach on a stick, undermined the stick so that it fell, and then buried it as well as the body. By a series of experiments Fabre proved that if the stick did fall it must have been with no conscious intention on the part of the beetles. These insects are able to shake their dead prey down from bushes, to cut the creeping stems of couch grass, to bite through limbs by which the game is suspended, and to perform other complicated operations. But should the conditions of the problem deviate ever so slightly from those which the beetles may meet with in nature, then they are beaten—beaten from lack not of bodily ability, but of reasoning power.

And so, Fabre concludes over and over again, reason cannot have arisen from such dullness.

If we practically believed in the presence of our guardian angels there would be more ladies and gentlemen in the world.—Dr. Austin O'Malley.

.. " OCCASIONAL VERSES " ..

— By J.K. —

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