**St. Patrick Day**

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St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, is one of Christianity's most widely known figures. But for all his celebrity, his life remains somewhat of a mystery. Many of the stories traditionally associated with St. Patrick, including the famous account of his banishing all the snakes from Ireland, are false, the products of hundreds of years of exaggerated storytelling.

# Taken Prisoner By Irish Raiders

It is known that St. Patrick was born in Britain to wealthy parents near the end of the fourth century. He is believed to have died on March 17, around 460 A.D. Although his father was a Christian deacon, it has been suggested that he probably took on the role because of tax incentives and there is no evidence that Patrick came from a particularly religious family. At the age of sixteen, Patrick was taken prisoner by a group of Irish raiders who were attacking his family's estate. They transported him to Ireland where he spent six years in captivity. (There is some dispute over where this captivity took place. Although many believe he was taken to live in Mount Slemish in County Antrim, it is more likely that he was held in County Mayo near Killala.) During this time, he worked as a shepherd, outdoors and away from people. Lonely and afraid, he turned to his religion for solace, becoming a devout Christian. (It is also believed that Patrick first began to dream of converting the Irish people to Christianity during his captivity.)

After more than six years as a prisoner, Patrick escaped. According to his writing, a voicewhich he believed to be God'sspoke to him in a dream, telling him it was time to leave Ireland. To do so, Patrick walked nearly 200 miles from County Mayo, where it is believed he was held, to the Irish coast. After escaping to Britain, Patrick reported that he experienced a second revelationan angel in a dream tells him to return to Ireland as a missionary. Soon after, Patrick began religious training, a course of study that lasted more than fifteen years. After his ordination as a priest, he was sent to Ireland with a dual missionto minister to Christians already living in Ireland and to begin to convert the Irish. (Interestingly, this mission contradicts the widely held notion that Patrick introduced Christianity to Ireland.)

# 2. Bonfires and Crosses

Familiar with the Irish language and culture, Patrick chose to incorporate traditional ritual into his lessons of Christianity instead of attempting to eradicate native Irish beliefs. For instance, he used bonfires to celebrate Easter since the Irish were used to honoring their gods with fire. He also superimposed a sun, a powerful Irish symbol, onto the Christian cross to create what is now called a Celtic cross, so that veneration of the symbol would seem more natural to the Irish.

Although there were a small number of Christians on the island when Patrick arrived, most Irish practiced a nature-based pagan religion. The Irish culture centered around a rich tradition of oral legend and myth. When this is considered, it is no surprise that the story of Patrick's life became exaggerated over the centuries spinning exciting tales to remember history has always been a part of the Irish way of life.

# 3. The First Parade

St. Patrick's Day is celebrated on March 17, his religious feast day and the anniversary of his death in the fifth century. The Irish have observed this day as a religious holiday for thousands of years. On St. Patrick's Day, which falls during the Christian season of Lent, Irish families would traditionally attend church in the morning and celebrate in the afternoon. Lenten prohibitions against the consumption of meat were waived and people would dance, drink, and feaston the traditional meal of Irish bacon and cabbage.

The first St. Patrick's Day parade took place not in Ireland, but in the United States. Irish soldiers serving in the English military marched through New York City on March 17, 1762. Along with their music, the parade helped the soldiers to reconnect with their Irish roots, as well as fellow Irishmen serving in the English army. Over the next thirty-five years, Irish patriotism among American immigrants flourished, prompting the rise of so-called "Irish Aid" societies, like the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick and the Hibernian Society. Each group would hold annual parades featuring bagpipes (which actually first became popular in the Scottish and British armies) and drums.

# 4. No Irish Need Apply

Up until the mid-nineteenth century, most Irish immigrants in America were members of the Protestant middle class. When the Great Potato Famine hit Ireland in 1845, close to a million poor, uneducated, Catholic Irish began to pour into America to escape starvation. Despised for their religious beliefs and funny accents by the American Protestant majority, the immigrants had trouble finding even menial jobs. When Irish Americans in the country 's cities took to the streets on St. Patrick's Day to celebrate their heritage, newspapers portrayed them in cartoons as drunk, violent monkeys.

However, the Irish soon began to realize that their great numbers endowed them with a political power that had yet to be exploited. They started to organize, and their voting block, known as the "green machine," became an important swing vote for political hopefuls. Suddenly, annual St. Patrick's Day parades became a show of strength for Irish Americans, as well as a must-attend event for a slew of political candidates. In 1948, President Truman attended New York City 's St. Patrick's Day parade, a proud moment for the many Irish whose ancestors had to fight stereotypes and racial prejudice to find acceptance in America.

# 5. Wearing of the Green Goes Global

Today, St. Patrick's Day is celebrated by people of all backgrounds in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Although North America is home to the largest productions, St. Patrick's Day has been celebrated in other locations far from Ireland, including Japan, Singapore, and Russia.

In modern-day Ireland, St. Patrick's Day has traditionally been a religious occasion. In fact, up until the 1970s, Irish laws mandated that pubs be closed on March 17. Beginning in 1995, however, the Irish government began a national campaign to use St. Patrick's Day as an opportunity to drive tourism and showcase Ireland to the rest of the world. Last year, close to one million people took part in Ireland 's St. Patrick's Festival in Dublin, a multi-day celebration featuring parades, concerts, outdoor theater productions, and fireworks shows.

6. Leprechauns

Leprechauns are little make-believe fairies from Ireland. They are the little old men who are shoemakers for the fairies. They usually stand about 2 feet tall. Treasure hunters can often track down a leprechaun by the sound of his shoemaker's hammer. The legend is that if you catch one you can force him to tell you where he hides his gold.

**The Leprechaun**

*By Robert Dwyer Joyce (1830-83*

In a shady nook one moonlit night,

A leprahaun I spied

In scarlet coat and cap of green,

A cruiskeen by his side.

Twas tick, tack, tick, his hammer went,

Upon a weeny shoe,

And I laughed to think of a purse of gold,

But the fairy was laughing too.

With tip-toe step and beating heart,

Quite softly I drew night.

There was mischief in his merry face,

A twinkle in his eye;

He hammered and sang with tiny voice,

And sipped the mountain dew;

Oh! I laughed to think he was caught at last,

But the fairy was laughing, too.

As quick as thought I grasped the elf,

"Your fairy purse," I cried,

"My purse?" said he, "'tis in her hand,

That lady by your side."

I turned to look, the elf was off,

And what was I to do?

Oh! I laughed to think what a fool I'd been,

And, the fairy was laughing too.

**The Jig's Up**

The leprechauns are laughing

For their day is finally here

The legends and the folklore

Seep through the atmosphere

The dancers are all ready

An Irish jig is in the air

The walls of the pubs are bursting

There is not an empty chair

As the night becomes the morning,

The barman leads the song

From Danny Boy to Irish Eyes

The serenade goes on.

Then a husky voice is heard to say

Make this your final stein

For St. Patrick's day is over

At it's time Gentlemen it's time.

# 7. Superstitions

Some say that in Ireland on St. Patrick's Day the traditional green beer is prominent. However, in Ireland, many years ago, St. Patrick's Day is considered a holy day and Pubs were not open for business. There were no parades, no drinking or wearing green. Green was considered an unlucky color.

**The Clover**

To find a piece of clover with four leaves is regarded far and wide as a bringer of good fortune, and many people will spend an idle half hour or so wandering across summer fields hoping to spot one - and they are actually not as rare as generally supposed. In some parts of Britian it is said that if a young man or woman finds such a clover they can expect to meet their future love the same day. The fact that cattle particularly enjoy grazing in fields of clover is the origin of the phrase often applied to a person doing well in life, 'He's in clover.' ( Incidentally, you can enhance your chances of good luck after finding a four-leafed clover by handing it to someone else ). The reputation of the four-leafed clover springs from the tradition that Eve took one with her when she was expelled from paradise. There is an old saying accociated with the leaf that goes:

One leaf for fame, one leaf for wealth,

One leaf for a faithful lover,

And one leaf to bring glorious health -

All are in the four-leaf clover.'

There is also a tradition that should you find one of the extremely rare five-leaf clovers then you will become very wealthy. ( Irish readers might like to note that the same traditions apply to their national flower, the Shamrock ). Finally, during the war years there was a superstition that if a man wore a four-leafed clover in his button hole he would avoid millitary service!

Green

The color green has for many years been regarded as an unlucky color in Britian and America and certainly no bride hoping for a happy future would dream of wearing it as any part of her ensemble. The origin of this superstition is that it was the color of the fairies and little people and they had such power over it they could easily steal away anyone they found wearing it.

Many actors and actresses also believe it is an ill-omened color, and that to wear a green costume on stage is to bring misfortune to both the play and it's players. It has been suggested, too, that the use of green on postage stamps is an ill-omen and that whenever the Post Office have employed it on any new issue the country has immediately suffered unrest and great social problems.

In contrast, it is interesting to note that in several European countries green is regarded as lucky because of its association with the spirits of the trees, and superstition there says that to hang green branches over doorways not only keeps away misfortune but drives witches and demons off.

# The Blarney Stone

The Blarney Stone is a stone set in the wall of the Blarney Castle tower in the Irish village of Blarney. Kissing the stone is supposed to bring the kisser the gift of persuasive eloquence. The legend says that an old woman cast a spell on the stone to reward a king who had saved her from drowning. Kissing the stone while under the spell gave the king the ability to speak sweetly and convincingly. It's difficult reach the stone. Kissers have to lie on their back and bend backward or downward, holding iron bars for support.

**8. Other Superstitions**

Moon, moon tell unto me,

When my true love I shall see?

What fine clothes am I to wear?

How many children will I bear?

For if my love comes not to me,

Dark and dismal my life will be.

- This verse, recited by a maiden as she gathered special herbs by the light of the first full moon of the new year, could reveal a future husband and cause the girl to have a true dream about the man--if she first complied with certain requirements. With a black-handled knife she had to cut out three pieces of earth, bring them home, tie them in her left stocking, and secure the bundle with her right garter. The completed package then had to be placed upon her pillow.

- When yawning, make the sign of the cross instantly over your mouth, or the evil spirit will make a rush down and take up his abode with you.

- It is unlucky to offer your right hand in salutation, for there is an old saying, "A curse with the left hand to those we hate, but the right hand to those we honor."

- If the palm of your hand itches you will be getting money; if the elbow, you will be changing beds.

- Breaking a mirror brought seven years of bad luck, while two people washing hands in the same basin at the same time courted disaster.

# 9. The Truth about Saint Patrick

Ah yes, on this day of days, the beer flows green and the passions and pride of country swell. All in remembrance of one holy man who spread the word of God amongst the heathens! Oh for the truth to be known for the truth is better than the made-up story of this man.

Who was Saint Patrick?

He was not an Irishman by birth but by heart.

The man known to all of us as the blessed Saint Patrick was born in a small Welsh village with the rather humble name of Cowbridge. This is a small farming community just south and west of what is now Cardiff.

It was here that he was raised in the old Welsh religion and with out a doubt visited and prayed at the Margam Abbey which was only ten miles from his home.

Patrick had the misfortune to have been captured by coastal raiders one day and was eventually sold into slavery in Ireland. Here he spent seven years tending the flocks of his keepers whom though they bought him, as a slave did not treat him unduly harsh.

Eventually Patrick escaped his captivity and returned to his village and began to study with the priests at Margam Abbey.

He spent 12 years in schooling and prayer before being sent back to Ireland not by the church in Rome but by the church in Wales.

You see there is a common misconception that Patrick was under the direction of the Roman Catholic Church centered in Rome, when actually his direction and influence came from Llandaff Cathedral in Wales.

It is generally accepted that the rule of the Roman Catholic Church in Great Britain began with the arrival of Augustine in 597 AD. Since St. Patrick died around 490 AD it would have been quite hard for him to have been under the direction of the church.

This leaves only one possible solution. Patrick was a member of the Welsh church established in 37 AD by Joseph of Arimathea. And since the seat of the church was Llandaff Cathedral, only 12 miles from his home, it is safe to assume that he came under its influence.

Patrick had been sent to Ireland to bring the residing Christians back to the fold and to convert the heathens. Heathens meaning those who still followed the Druid religion and other pagan Gods.

Now you have to understand that these Druids were not the original Druids that frequented the lands of Wales and Greater Britain for they had been eradicated en-masse by the Roman Legions in 70 AD on the Island of Holy Head.

The Irish Druids could at best be described as a Hybrid form of Druids. Where the original religious practice was the observance of the laws of nature and a celebration of life in general, the Irish form of the religion weighted heavily on the magical side with even hints of human sacrifices thrown in. In short a polar opposite of the original.

Patrick having been born and raised near the seat of Druid teaching in southern Wales would have been very aware of the customs and practices of the Druids. It is a well accepted fact that upon the arrival of Christianity in 37 AD, the locals Druids interacted with the Christians closely.

So it should come as no surprise that Patrick had at his disposal an intimate knowledge of the Irish Druids and this made it easier for him to go head to head with the religion.

Now Ireland never did have any snakes that I am aware of. It is the opinion of this writer that the use of the idea that "Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland" is another way of describing the pushing aside of the Druids. In religious connotation the snake has always been seen as a symbol of evil and the devil and I am quite sure that during the retelling of the story during the middle ages that this descriptive terminology was used and eventually accepted as fact.

Take all the hoopla and put it aside and we are left with an amazing story of one man against an established belief system.

A man following his own beliefs and the teachings of his church doing battle with a foe in a country that he once was enslaved.

To say that Saint Patrick was brave is an understatement, for he faced certain death returning to Ireland as an escaped slave. To say that he was intelligent is mute as he matched wits with the leaders of the Druids and bested them. To say he was pure of heart is to be humble, for only a man of conviction and true belief could have survived and triumphed over the odds he faced.

To say that Patrick is worthy of Sainthood is to acknowledge all his achievements and recognize his true value to the world. This, to me, is better than the made-up stories of his deeds.

# 10. Sayings

1. A man that can't laugh at himself should be given a mirror.

2. A man takes a drink; the drink takes a drink; the drink takes the man.

3. A narrow neck keeps the bottle from being emptied in one swig.

4. Morning is the time to pity the sober. The way they're feeling then is the best they're going to feel all day.

5. You can lead the horse to the well, but you can't make him drink.

6. Better the coldness of a friend than the sweetness of an enemy.

7. Be nice to them on the way up. You might meet them all on the way down.

8. If a man fools me once, shame on him. If he fools me twice, shame on me.

9. Let your anger set the sun and not rise again with it.

## 11. Toasts

Here's to absent friends and here's twice to absent enemies.

Here's to the light heart and the heavy hand.

Thirst is a shameless disease so here's to a shameful cure.

Here's to a wet night and a dry morning.

May we always have a clean shirt, a clean conscience, and a bob in the pocket.

May you be across Heaven's threshold before the old boy knows you're dead.