

ST. PATRICK'S DAY

by Hamish Hendry

The national emblem of Ireland is a plant, the leaf of which has three small leaflets. This is called the Shamrock. It is beloved by Irish folks at all times, but most of them wear it conspicuously upon the 17th day of March. St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, and that is St. Patrick's Day. There are very good reasons why the Saint should be honoured by Irishmen, yet it is a curious fact that he was not born in Ireland. Indeed, there is some doubt regarding both the time and place of his birth. Some people think that the Saint was born in France, while others hold that his birthplace was at Kilpatrick, near Dunbarton, in Scotland.

But this we know for certain that St. Patrick, when he was a lad of sixteen years of age, was captured by pirates on his father's farm and carried by them to Ireland, where he was sold into slavery. The Irish Chief who bought the lad lived in County Antrim, near Sleamish Mountain, and he employed Patrick in herding swine. All the people who lived in that part of Ireland at this time—about the end of the 4th century—were heathen. Now, young Patrick had been trained by his father and grandfather in the Christian religion, and it made him very unhappy to think that his master, and the people of Ireland, were ignorant of the true faith; he was also unhappy when he thought of his home and his friends. But after six years he escaped from slavery, and sailed away from Ireland.

He went to another country, either Scotland or France, and there became a priest and a preacher of the Christian religion. Patrick was very successful, and after many years he was made a Bishop. But all this time he kept in remembrance the people of Ireland who had never heard the Gospel, and at last he determined to go and preach the good news in the country where he had been a slave and a swineherd. He was sixty years of age when he landed in Wicklow as the apostle of Christianity to Ireland, but Patrick was a strong old man and he had great faith in his message. Up and down the country he travelled converting the heathen Chiefs and their followers. As many as 12,000 people were baptised with his own hands, and by his efforts the Christian religion was firmly planted in Ireland. A great many marvellous stories are told about the Saint. It is said, for instance, that on one occasion he made a heap of snow-balls blaze up into a fire by simply breathing upon them; and there is also the well-known legend that he drove all the snakes from Ireland by the beating of a drum. The year of his death is uncertain, but we know that he must have been a very old man, and that he was buried at Downpatrick.

This is the man who is held in honour by Irishmen in all parts of the world. On St. Patrick's Day they give themselves a holiday, and make merry,—those of them, at least, who still remain in the old Catholic Church. Surely that is well. For in honouring St. Patrick the Irish people do honour to themselves, and to all that is noble and brave in their long sad history.

Source:

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