

## St. Patrick, the Patron Saint of Ireland

By Sonal Panse

St. Patrick's Day, which is celebrated every year on the 17th of March, is a very big event honoring the man credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. St. Patrick, whose real name was Maewyn Succat, was born in Roman Britain around 400 A.D. His father, who was called Calpornius, was a light-hearted deacon of the village Bannavern Taburniae - at least, since it's mentioned that he wasn't a hard-core religious pro, I assume he might have been the sort that's easy on the nerves generally. The family was wealthy and so growing up wasn't a struggle for survival for young Maewyn. He was a wild youngster - one who 'did not know the true God' and 'did not keep His commandments, and did not obey our priests, who used to remind us of our salvation', according to his own latter-day account - apparently and admirably, he knew who he was and had no mind to give in to peer pressure. His independence however soon landed him in trouble. He wandered away from the crowd and became an easy kidnapping target for the Irish Pirates that roamed the coast along his village. He was duly kidnapped and taken away to Ireland.

Maewyn, at the time of his abduction, was sixteen, and he was to remain in captivity for the next six years. In those times slavery was quite commonplace and human rights an unknown phenomenon. The Irish Heathens were in no mind to make life easy for their new slave and the slave, after a soft, easy existence so far, didn't truckle too kindly to hard labor, so, of course, there was plenty of friction. Somehow he survived the ill-treatment, but it didn't leave him any affection for the Heathens and it also affected his mind to no small degree. With all avenues of succor seemingly closed, he turned, as most of us would, to the only way left - to religion. The newest converts to any enterprise are usually its most fervent champions, and so it was with Maewyn. His job was to tend the flock of sheep belonging to his Master and that left him plenty of solitude as he wandered around the mountainside to indulge in his new interest. He came to the conclusion that it was his own past 'wickedness' that had led to his slavery and he needed to repent his sins. Soon - and in all kinds of weather - he got around to saying a hundred prayers 'in a single day' and 'almost as many in the night'. His numbed mind awoke and it occurred to him now that since he wasn't kept in fetters he ought to make a bid for escape. There was always a ship or two at the coast, he had learned during his six years in Ireland, and if he could get onto one, he could get away from the accursed land. He explains this realization as a religious experience. That sounds better than, Jesus, it took me six long years to realize....

So, one day, he left his flock grazing and ran away some two hundred miles to the coast. As expected there was a ship there, but at first they didn't want him along - he had no money and they didn't believe him when he said his family would pay them when he got home. Maewyn at once began to pray. Alright, alright, said the Captain, get on, and they set sail. Three days later they touched dry land and continued the journey on foot for twenty-eight days. It was an arduous trek and they ran out of food. The Captain, who had perhaps had enough of Maewyn's prayers by now, suggested sarcastically that he pray for some culinary sustenance now. Maewyn, who was above such petty sarcasm, duly prayed, and, as luck would have it, a self-sacrificing family of wild pigs came trotting along.

From then on it was an easy trip. Maewyn got back in one piece to the family bosom and for a time stayed put amongst them. But he had made up his mind to become a Priest and so went to France to undergo the training. He had an Uncle in Tours and there is one story about his crossing the River Loire to visit him - 'using his cape as a raft' - he swam across, if you ask me. Afterwards he hung his cape out to dry on a hawthorn bush and the dripping water from his cape immediately caused the bush to burst into bloom, and this is the reason that the Hawthorn blooms regularly in the winter in the Loire Valley.

A story, like I said, and a fine one.

Maewyn completed his priest's training and adopted the name he was to be henceforth known by, Patrick or Patricius. He would have returned home, except a persistent voice in his head told him to go to Ireland and turn the tables on those Heathens that had tormented him so long. So he went to Ireland and remained there this time for the next thirty years. He wrote many Christian texts, only two of which, the Epistle to Coroticus and the Confessio, have survived to the present day. He also, according to legend, climbed the 2500 feet Croagh Patrick and rang his bell until the din drove the snakes from Ireland. Not a lover of the dumb animals the Lord God made, this man. Actually, this story was invented by Jocelyn, a 12th Century Northumbrian, who detested snakes it can be safely supposed. There are no snakes in New Zealand either, by the way, and it's a historical fact that no Saint ever went there.

By the time St. Patrick was done with the good work in Ireland, there were Monasteries, Churches, and Schools throughout the land, and being a Heathen was no longer a matter of cultural pride.

He died on 17 March 460, and the Irish have been celebrating that day ever since.  
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