

St Patrick – by Michael J Mates

In 1982, I completed my doctoral thesis, *The British Church from Patrick to Gildas*, at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena California. For St. Patrick's Day, I reduced the thesis to a shorter form, to fit the tune "*The Wearin' o' the Green*."

Both the thesis and the song recapitulate Patrick's birth in western Britain (c 390 AD), his capture by Irish pirates, his time spent as a slave in Ireland, his escape, and his eventual return to Ireland to preach the Gospel to the natives, despite the opposition of the British church. The British church in the late 4th century was following the practice that non-Christian tribes really ought to become Roman (i.e., wear togas, speak Latin) before they could think of becoming Christian. Patrick thought that was backwards, and defied his home church in returning to Ireland.

When Patricius, born in Britain,
Saw the ships upon the shore,
He little knew his future
Or the life we'll underscore.

'Twas about the year 400,
Roman Britain's crumbling fast,
When the lad was taken captive
By ship-borne iconoclasts.

O those ships were full of pirates
Who enslaved poor Pat for years,
On the isle now known as Eire,
O those rotten buccaneers.

But their evil had a purpose,
For when Pat escaped to home
He took an altered heart within;
He'd prejudice outgrown.

When the call to preach in Ireland
Came, young Patrick volunteered;
The British Church front office
Though, was mightily afeared:

"Why preach the Word to pagans
Ere they speak the Latin tongue
Or wear a toga rightly?
Pat, it simply isn't done!"

But Patricius answered boldly
"So you think they're troglodytes?
Well that's why I'm pros'lytizing
For religious freedom rights."

And so boldly back to Eire
Strong-willed Patrick made his way,
To preach to slaves and chieftains
Who converted day by day.

When at last his life was over--
That is, having lost his starch--
Old Patrick breathed his final breath,
The seventeenth of March.

'Tis the most ironic situation
And not one bit counterfeit:
That the patron saint of Ireland
Was a stubborn-minded Brit!