

**A SONG HISTORY FROM
HYMNAL COMPANION TO THE LUTHERAN BOOK OF WORSHIP**

by Marilyn Kay Stulken

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I BIND UNTO MYSELF TODAY (Atomriug indiu)

Tune: St. Patrick's Breastplate

Tradition ascribes this lorica to St. Patrick. By 690, when Tirechan wrote his *Collections*, it was directed to be sung in all the monasteries and churches throughout Ireland and was apparently universally attributed to Patrick. Our earliest sources of the hymn are two eleventh-century manuscripts, which were published in 1987 as *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*.

St. Patrick, whose birthdate is given variously as about 372, 381, or 389, was born in Britain, a descendant of a Christian family of at least three-generations' standing. In his *Confessions*, he gives the place of birth as "Bannavem Taberniae," the location of which is uncertain. His father was a Roman, and Patrick himself was a freeman and of noble birth. When he was sixteen, he was captured by raiders from Ireland and carried away to be sold as a slave. During the next six years he was obliged to feed livestock, but also had opportunity to devote himself to prayer and to become acquainted with the Irish language. He eventually escaped, and seems to have studied at Lerins from 412 to 415, after which he was ordained by Amator. In 431 he returned to Ireland to assist Palladius in his missionary efforts, and the following year was consecrated bishop of Ireland by Germanus. From that time on he spent his life in convert the Irish people to Christianity, organizing churches, and contending with the Druids. He died March 17, 461 (some sources give 466). In addition to his *Confessions*, his most important writings include the *Letter to Coroticus*.

According to legend Patrick and the Druid king Loegaire met at Tara Hill, where a festival of the Druid fire-worshippers was about to begin with the

extinction of all fires through the country. Patrick, however, defiantly lighted a Paschal fire on the Hill of Slane in full view of the King, who then set out to kill Patrick. In the pursuit, Patrick and his companions were miraculously transformed into deer and recited this hymn in flight; hence its title, "Faeth Fiada," or "The Deer's Cry." A translation of the preface to the hymn which is found in the eleventh-century manuscripts mentioned above reads:

Patrick made this hymn; in the time of Loegaire mac Neill, it was made, and the cause of its composition was for the protection of himself and his monks against the deadly enemies that lay in ambush for the clerics. And it is a lorica of faith for the protection of body and soul against demons and men and vices: when any person shall recite it daily with pious meditation on God, demons shall not dare to face him, it shall be a protection to him against all poison and envy, it shall be a guard to him against sudden death, it shall be a lorica for his soul after his decease.

Patrick sang it when the ambuscades were laid for him by Loegaire, in order that he should not go to Tara to sow the Faith, so that on that occasion they were seen before those who were lying in ambush as if they were wild deer having behind them a fawn, viz. Benen; and 'Deer's Cry' is its name.

The English verse paraphrase was made by Cecil Frances Alexander (LBW 114) for use on St. Patrick's Day, 1889. First printed on a leaflet and sung throughout Ireland on that day, it was included the same year in the Writings of St. Patrick, edited by C. H. H. Wright.

ST. PATRICK'S BREATPLATE. This Irish air is given in George Petrie's *Collection of Irish Music*, edited by C. V. Stanford (LBW 189), 1903, where it is headed, "The Hymn of St. Bernard. Jesu dulcis memoria [LBW 316]. From Mr. Southwell." The present form of the tune is from *The English Hymnal*, 1906, and the harmonization is by Carl Schalk (LBW 118) from the *Worship Supplement*, 1969, to *The Lutheran Hymnal*.