

The Breastplate of Saint Patrick
Represented with Some Brief, Explanatory Notes
by William D Pratney
Last Updated 10-02-2012 (British Calendar System)

Legend tells of a time when Patrick and his companions were on their way to Tara—a major city in Ireland in the 5th Century and home of Loiguire MacNeil, high king of Ireland—in advance of the Gospel. The story goes, that Loiguire had set ambushments along the road to Tara, to prevent Patrick and his men from reaching it. On his side, Loiguire had powerful sorcerers— druidic masters of the dark arts. It would be a monumental showdown. Patrick knew the kind of opposition that awaited him that day. This lorica, or "breastplate" is attributed to Patrick and is believed to be a poem that he chanted or a hymn that he sang, prior to his confrontation with Loiguire. Both Patrick and his companions are said to have used this hymn, apparently, to protect themselves from both natural and supernatural enemies. Legend holds that on their journey to Tara they were able to pass, unhindered, by an otherwise deadly ambushment, and appeared to those that hid in wait for them as but deer and a fawn. It is to the recital of this hymn that some have attributed this legendary miraculous deliverance.

The following was taken from: *The Life and Writings of St Patrick, with Appendices, Etc.,* by Rev. Dr. Healy, 1905, Pg. 705-708; Adobe Reader Pg. 730-733

The Deer's Cry*

* WDP Note: Also known as "The Breastplate" or Lorica of Patrick

I bind to myself today
The strong power of an invocation of the Trinity,
The faith of the Trinity in Unity,
The Creator of the elements.

I bind to myself today
The power of the Incarnation of Christ
with that of His Baptism,
The power of the Crucifixion,
with that of His Burial,
The power of the Resurrection
with the Ascension,
The power of the Coming
to the sentence of Judgement

I bind to myself today
The power of the love of Seraphim,
In obedience of Angels,
[In the service of Archangels,]

In the hope of Resurrection unto reward,
In the prayers of the noble Fathers,
In the predictions of the Prophets,
In the preaching of Apostles,
In the faith of Confessors,
In the purity of holy Virgins,
In the acts of Righteous men.

I bind to myself today
The power of Heaven,
The light of the Sun,
The whiteness of Snow,
The force of Fire,
The flashing of Lightning,
The velocity of Wind,
The depth of the Sea,
The stability of the Earth,
The hardness of Rocks.

I bind to myself today
The power of God to guide me
The might of God to uphold me
The wisdom of God to teach me,
The eye of God to watch over me,
The ear of God to hear me,
The word of God to give me speech,
The hand of God to protect me,
The way of God to prevent* me,
The shield of God to shelter me,
The host** of God to defend me,
 Against the snares of demons,
 Against the temptations of vices,
 Against the lusts of nature,
 Against every man who meditates injury to me,
 Whether far or near,
 With few or with many.

* WDP Note: prevent here has the older English meaning-to go before

** WDP Note: host here means armies

I have set around me all these powers,
 Against every hostile savage power,
 Directed against my body and my soul,
 Against the incantations of false prophets,
 Against the black laws of heathenism,

Against the false laws of heresy,
Against the deceits of idolatry,
Against the spells of women and smiths, and druids,
Against all knowledge which blinds the soul of man.

Christ protect me today
Against poison,
Against burning,
Against drowning,
Against wound.
That I may receive abundant reward.

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ within me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ at my right,
Christ at my left,
Christ in the fort,
Christ in the chariot-seat,
Christ in the poop*.
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks to me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

* WDP Note: The poop refers to an observation deck raised above the farthest back part of a ship. It was often where the captain would be, issuing orders to the helmsman. When Patrick says, "Christ in the poop" he is using sailing terminology to say, "Christ in control: Christ in that place of authority to issue orders." Poop can also refer to the uppermost cabin room in the farthestback part of the ship. Some other versions exclude or translate differently "Christ in the fort...Christ in the poop."

I bind to myself today,
The strong power of an invocation of the Trinity,
The faith of the Trinity in Unity,
The Creator of [the elements].

Salvation is of the Lord,
Salvation is of the Lord,
Salvation is of Christ,
May thy salvation, O Lord, be ever with us.

The following was taken from: *The Epistles and Hymn of Saint Patrick, with the Poem of Secundinus, Translated into English. Edited by Rev. Thomas Olden, Published 1876*, Pg. 51-53; Adobe Reader Pg. 64-66

An Explanation of St. Patrick's Lorica

"...how is this language to be understood? What meaning must be attached to the word, 'invoke,' which will harmonize with St. Patrick's known opinions and with the hymn as a whole?"

"The formula, 'I bind myself to,' is not a prayer." "The former [stanza] is concerned with things; the later [stanza; 'Christ protect me today...'] is a direct prayer to a personal Christ.

The meaning of the expression, 'I bind myself to,' appears to be, 'I connect myself with, or claim to have on my side,' these virtues or powers.

The conclusion then appears to be, that, regarding all evil-moral, intellectual, and physical—as springing from the agency of demoniac powers, which were obedient to spells and incantations, he felt himself, on the other hand, in intimate union with One who was not only the Creator, but the Ruler of all things, and the immediate source of all the operations of nature."

"Though Druids muttered their incantations, and witches wove their spells, they could not touch him, for the powers of nature were on his side, not on their's; and now he claims his privileges, and 'binds himself' to them all."

"It has been thought that the saint invoked the power of the sun, as he had invoked the power or virtue of the angels, apostles, and virgins.' To this there is no reply, but that he, as a 'Catholic missionary, who had come to convert a nation from idolatry,' *could not* have done so. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that if he prayed to the saints he must also have prayed to the sun, for his language is the same with respect to both."

Other sources:

1. *The Tripartite Life of Patrick with Other Documents Relating to that Saint. Edited with Translations and Indexes by Whitley Stokes, D.C.L., LL.D., Part 1, 1887*, Pg. 47; AR Pg. 258

2. *The Life and Writings of St Patrick, with Appendices, Etc., by Rev. Dr. Healy, 1905*, Pg. 560; Adobe Reader Pg. 585

3. *Translations of Christian Literature. Series 5. Lives of the Celtic Saints.*

St. Patrick, His Writings and Life, by Newport J. D. White, 1920, Pg 61-64; Adobe Reader 72-75

4. www.wisegEEK.com/what-is-a-poop-deck.htm

5. <http://dictionary.babylon.com/poop>

6. *The Epistles and Hymn of Saint Patrick, with the Poem of Secundinus, Translated into English. Edited by Rev. Thomas Olden, Published 1876*, Pg. 50-54; Adobe Reader Pg. 63-67