

LEPRECHAUNS, SHAMROCKS AND THE FLEUR-DE-LIS

By John F. Hall

Every once in a while, I will deviate from the task at hand and lighten up with a little humor. I have three little self-standing leprechaun ornaments. I just liked them and I don't recall ever putting them on my Christmas tree. I keep them on my entertainment cabinet. One playing the violin fell off the cabinet and broke in half. My wife, Paula glued it back together. The violin bow broke in the fall, so I got a toothpick and broke it in three pieces and used the smallest piece to make the leprechaun's violin bow. I glued it to the violin.



Every March 17th the country celebrates Saint Patrick's Day. Many young people will wear an item of green on their clothing, more to avoid getting pinched rather than to celebrate that day. The older folks will hang shamrock flags, wear Irish costumes, and march in parades celebrating their Irish heritage. The city of Chicago Plumbers Union 130 dyed the Chicago River emerald green to honor its long standing Saint Patrick's Day tradition. In 2003, one of the parade organizers told a newspaper reporter revealing the vegetable-based dye would be a kin to "telling where the leprechaun hides its gold."

Leprechauns are part of the Irish lore. Their name is thought to come from the word "luchorpan." It means small body. According to Irish lore, these little folks live in tiny underground caves or in hollow tree trunks. They are shoe cobblers to earn their iconic pots of gold. Some Saint Patrick's Day fans keep their Christmas trees up long after Christmas. They remove the Christmas ornaments and replace them with Shamrocks,



leprechauns, gold coins, rainbows and many other green and gold ornaments. I never did, but I kept the three self-standing ornaments on display in the entertainment cabinet on the second floor of my old antebellum farm house.

Over the years, the history of leprechauns became associated with everything green. Today, a leprechaun is depicted as an old man dressed in a green hat and green suit, wearing buckled shoes. Go into any grocery store, and you will find a picture of a leprechaun on a box of "Lucky Charms" cereal. Legend has it that there are no female leprechauns which adds to the mysterious and magical qualities of these tiny folks of lore. The good natured American leprechaun became a symbol of Saint Patrick's Day.

According to Irish legend, Saint Patrick chose the three leaved clover or shamrock as a symbol of the Church's Holy Trinity because of its three leaflets bound by a common stalk. Saint Patrick was a 5th-century missionary to Ireland and later served as a bishop there. Shamrocks are associated with Saint Patrick because he may have used Shamrocks

to explain Christian Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Legend says that Saint Patrick cast out all snakes in Ireland. But scientists believe that snakes never existed in Ireland.

There is a song written by Marc Gunn called “The Leprechaun.” These are a few of Marc Gunn’s lyrics: “There’s a leprechaun in my head and I wish that it were dead. For I don’t think he’ll e’er let me be. Oh, he tempts me with is gold and if I were e’er so bold, I’d strangle him and leave him in the street. There’s a leprechaun in my room and he swats me with a broom. That’s the reason I forgot the words of this song. Oh, he shows me a four-leaf clover, and before me song is over, he’s buried in a bowl of Lucky Charms. There’s a leprechaun on the floor. He says that I’m a bore. His eyes begin to glaze, and he starts to yawn. He lays down to sleep, But I can see one eye a peepin’. He’s watching me with deep envy inside. There’s a leprechaun on a hill, and I know his gold there. So I grab him by the neck ‘fore he gets away. The pot’s too heavy, he giggles, so I pinch me just a little, and he thinks he’s fooled me as I run away...”

According to legend, the leprechaun is a shoemaker who spends most of his time making and fixing shoes- Some say that when a leprechaun is near, you can hear a tap- tap-tapping of his tiny hammer as he drives nails into shoes. The leprechaun is very mischievous and enjoys playing tricks on those he meets. As for my three leprechaun ornaments, one plays the flute; one plays the violin, and one plays a bodhran Irish drum.

The shamrock’s symbolism is similar to the fleur-de-lis. I was a Boy Scout and our emblem is a red fleur-de-lis with an eagle flying in front of it. The three pedals of the fluer- de-lis came to symbolize the three aspects of the Scout Promise. These include duty to God, responsibility to self, and service to others. In Christianity, lilies symbolize purity and chastity. The fleur-de-lis historically represented the Virgin Mary. Coins from the 11th century, noble seals, statues, and stained-glass windows depict the Virgin Mary holding a flower. The three pedals of the fleur-de-lis established a clear connection with the three persons of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I started this story about three leprechaun ornaments, and then I drifted over to the fleur-de-lis, then to the Boy Scouts. I was a Tenderfoot Boy Scout. A Scout can work on the requirements for Tenderfoot Second Class, and First Class ranks at the same time, but each rank must be earned in sequence. This was the first organization that I joined when I was a kid. The things that I learned as a Scout I used through-out my life.

I’ll end this story with a piece by Nancy Watson Dodrill called “Words.” These are her words: “May our words give peace and comfort to those who are in need; may they bring a spot of joy and love, and somehow plant a seed that will blossom into kindness, that will rest a needy soul; for where else upon this earthly plane can love achieve this goal? May our words be blessed by Jesus, may each syllable be right, so we might be the candle that gives a darkened world His light; may they touch the broken-hearted with an element of hope, may they be a flow of happiness that a weaker child can cope. May our words give praise and honor to the Creator of the earth, may they be an instrument of peace that measures not the worth, but the graciousness and kindness of those who trust the King. May our words be ever-healing and, with His love, take wing.”

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