

McKEES HAVE BEEN CATHOLICS

THE FIRST armorial achievement confirmed to a McKee *sic* was recorded in 1906 in Dublin, matriculated by a Catholic priest Rev. John Reginald McKee. His arms of course expired with him. They were based on the achievement of an armigerous ancestor, who was however of the Presbyterian faith, and who was also of the present author's ilk.

Down through the centuries many McKee families have remained steadfastly of the Catholic faith. The early annals of both Ireland and Scotland disclose that in the years just following the Incarnation, when Christ's disciples were spreading the doctrines of Christianity into the darkest corners of pagan nations, their missionaries reached first Ireland and thence Scotland. Druidism was replaced, not however without violent resistance, by the ¹Celtic Church. The two great disciples of Christianity, St. Patrick and St. Columba, labored ceaselessly and with monumental effect, to implant the tenets of Christianity among the mighty tribes and clans of Ireland and Scotland to replace the blood-drenched methods of worship taught by the pagan priests of Druidism.

The historian Bede, who wrote in the eighth century, noted that the northern Picts of Scotland were converted by St. Columba in A.D. 565, but Ailred's *Life of St. Ninian* tells us that the saint was building his church when he heard of the death of St. Martin, whose demise occurred in the year A.D. 397. Thus, it would seem that the southern Picts were converted more than a century before those in the north of Scotland.

If any there be who doubt the horrors inherent in pagan worship, he should recollect Thomas Moore's comment in his *History of Ireland* (p. 43) : ". . . . the sacred grove and well—the circle of erect stones surrounding either the altar or the judgement-seat—the unhewn pillars, adored, as symbols of the Sun, by the Phœnicians—the sacred heaps, or Carnes, dedicated to the same primitive worship—the tomb-altars, called Cromlech, supposed to have been places as well of sepulture as of sacrifice—and, lastly, those horrible rites in which children were the burnt-offerings, which the Jewish idolaters perpetrated in a place called from thence the Valley of Shrieking, while, in Ireland, the scene of these frightful immolations bore the name of *Magh-Sleacht*, or the Place of Slaughter".

The history of the two nations is filled with anecdotes that concern the conversion of kings and chieftains to the Christian faith. Perhaps the most moving of these incidents was when Connor Mac Nessa, King of Ulster, convalescing from a skull wound inflicted by a brain-ball flung from an enemy sling, learned from a druid named Bacrach that Christ had been crucified *the previous night* on the other side of the world, and arose from his sick bed in anguished rage to rush through the forest slashing at trees with his sword in the persuasion that they were Christ's tormentors. The annals are replete with incidents just as inspiring.

Gradually, the mighty O'Neills of Ulster, the O'Donnells of Tirconnell, the Mac Eths of Scotland and countless other great clan groups adopted the Christian faith, which was represented solely by the Roman Catholic Church.

Until the time of the Reformation no other faith existed in either of these two great nations. Henry VIII quarrelled with the Pope about his marriage habits and generally adulterous conduct, and with the power of a sagacious but unscrupulous monarch established

¹ Protestants assert that the early Celtic church was not Roman Catholic, but Catholics believe that it was an arm of the Papacy from the beginning, St. Peter having been the first Pope.

the Church of England. In Scotland, the Presbyterian Church got under way with tremendous force following the signing of the Covenant by the heads of many clans. Church properties were confiscated both in England and Scotland, then in Ireland. Many great families continued to adhere to the Catholic faith, though it meant being completely stripped of everything they owned, while others followed the reformed religions of Presbyterianism and Episcopalianism. The latter tended to be the faith of the Highlands while Presbyterianism was that of the Lowlands.

In Ireland, most of the royal Irish families like the O'Neills and the O'Donnells adhered fast to the Catholic faith. Even on his voyage into exile the great Hugh O'Neill, a furious storm having arisen, trailed a piece of the true cross behind the ship on a line and the storm subsided. He died in Rome in 1616, a guest of the Pope and probably the greatest defender of the Catholic faith the Irish nation has ever known.

Scattered throughout the world there are thousands of McKees and families of McKee descent who hold fast to the Roman Catholic Faith. Theirs is indeed the faith of their fathers, ranging back as it does in many instances in an unbroken genealogical chain through eighty-odd generations, or for nearly twenty centuries.

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