

Book Bit for WTBF-AM/FM, Troy, AL for March 17, 2007

"Mysterious World: Ireland" by Ian Middleton and Douglas Elwell, with photographs by Ian Middleton and illustrations by Jim Fitzpatrick (Mysterious World Press)

As an American proud of his Irish ancestry, I've read dozens of books about Ireland's geography, history and traditions. But this is a very unique and beautiful volume which is loaded with fascinating information!

"Mysterious World: Ireland" is divided into three sections, all lavishly illustrated: The Mystery, the History, and the Journey. Section One deals with the pre-written/oral history of what would become Ireland. It starts with the Milesians, the first of the Gaelic peoples to invade the sacred isle. "The Gaels were only the most recent of a series of peoples who had invaded the sacred island over the millennia...there were 5 peoples who had invaded Ireland before the coming of the Gael..." all the descendants of Magog, the son of Japheth, the son of Noah." The descendants of Magog included such prominent peoples as the French, the Romans, the Russians and the Scythians, a magnificent race of tall, Caucasian, blonde and red-haired warriors who dominated the Central Asian steppes. They were the first to use the horse in battle, they developed the composite bow, and wore brightly-colored tartan-style fabrics and breeches for riding horses. They ranged as far as India and Ireland. The accounts tell of waves of invaders, heroic warriors and beautiful women, wizards and druids. There are tales of the pagan deities who were worshipped and feared, and the lesser beings, many of whom are familiar to modern ears: fairies, leprechauns and others of the sidhe or the Sith. These legends greatly influenced some of the 20th century's greatest story-tellers, like J.R.R. Tolkein and George Lucas.

The written history of Ireland really began in the 5th century AD when a former slave returned with the Gospel of Christ. Patrick revolutionized the island by changing the fundamental worldview of the inhabitants. (Before they routinely fought to the death over an insult, believing they would be reincarnated anyway. But now under Christianity their warlike demeanor was chilled.) Patrick's work was continued by indigenous Christians such as Brigid, Columba and Brendan the Navigator, whose stories are told. The Irish fell in love with the written language and translated everything they could find, including the classics from the Mediterranean world, rescuing them for civilization from the destruction which accompanied the fall of the Roman Empire. The Vikings invaded beginning in the 9th century, were assimilated, and all went well until the 11th century, where Ireland fell back into anarchy upon the death of Brian Boru. This was followed by the Norman invasions, then the English, leading in 1798 to unsuccessful revolution. The Great Famine in the 1840s killed over a million Irish and forced another million to flee to America, eliminating approximately 20% of the population! More revolutions followed, from the Fenians to the Easter Uprising of 1916, the War of Independence in 1919, and the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922.

That's half the book. The other half is a detailed travelogue of every square foot (it seems) of the Emerald Isle!

What a great book for St. Patrick's Day reading...or ANY day! For more, check the website www.mysteriousworld.com or ireland.mysteriousworld.com.

(repeat title, etc) I'm Doc Kirby and that's a Book Bit.