

The Druids

The ancient Celts were pagan. They had many gods as we learn from the ancient writings, legends and folklore. The pagan priests were called Druids. The Druid was a philosopher and magician, schooled in the lore of the traditions, and in charge of the education of the chieftains. They were physicians to the kings and their families. They worshiped their gods in open spaces and oak groves, springs and wells were of special significance. Many people believe they were capable of magic spells and of prophecy.

According to the Brehon laws, the numbers of colors which could be worn on the cloak of a person depending on social standing. More colors were allowed to those in higher stations. Druids were allowed to wear up to six colors, and only kings and Ollamhs ("professors?") were allowed seven.

There is little written account of the Druids. They maintained an oral tradition - that is to say their training and rites were committed to memory and little was written about them till the 18th century. Other mentions of the Druids were written by their enemies so those accounts are tarnished by virtue of this fact. In ancient mythical accounts there is favorable mention of their wisdom and deeds.



In the *Tain Bo Cuigne*, Cathbad (a Druid) is seen teaching the art of prophecy to a group of boys when he makes a prediction that the child who takes up the chariot on that night will become famous. CuChulainn overhears the speech and, with his friend, takes up the art of chariot riding. Later on he earns great fame. In the Fenian Cycle, Fionn MacCumhaill studies under a Druid living out in the woods, fishing for the Salmon of Knowledge. Only when Fionn shows up and the salmon is finally caught, the Druid instructs Fionn not to eat it. However, Fionn burns his thumb on the salmon, so the Druid recognizes that the fish was meant for him.

In the dawn of Christianity in Ireland, the early Druids opposed the introduction of Christian ideals, however eventually many pagan feasts and sacred places were adopted by the Irish church.

Under Brehon law, everyone's rights and obligations were carefully defined. Some of the land was worked in common for the chieftain, the priests, and the old, poor, and sick, the rest was apportioned as family farms. Grazing and foraging rights were

shared on the common lands. Much of the tribal business was conducted at annual assemblies, like the Feis at Tara where land disputes were decided, petty offenders were tried, and chiefs and officials, both male and female, were appointed by popular vote. The Druids, in conformance with the Brehon Laws, presided over most of these events.

Druids had to undergo 20 years of oral instruction, committing everything to memory before being recognized as qualified to be admitted to the social order of Druid.

Their knowledge of astronomy may have descended from the priests of megalithic times, together with the spiritual secrets of the landscape.