

The Wearing of The Green

by Dion Boucicault (1820-1890)

O Paddy dear, and did you hear the news that going round?
The shamrock is forbid by law to grow on Irish ground;
St. Patrick's Day no more we'll keep, his colours can't be seen,
For there's a bloody law against the wearing of the green
5 I met with Napper Tandy and he took me by the hand,
And he said, "How's poor old Ireland, and how does she stand?"
She's the most distressful counterie that ever yet was seen,
And they're hanging men and women for the wearing of the green.

Then since the colour we must wear is England's cruel red,
10 Sure Ireland's sons will ne'er forget the blood that they have shed.
You may take a shamrock from your hat and cast it on the sod,
It will take root and flourish there though underfoot it's trod¹.
When law can stop the blades of grass from growing as they grow,
And when the leaves in summer-time their verdure² dare not show,
15 Then will I change the colour that I wear in my caubeen³
But 'till that day, please God, I'll stick to wearing of the green.

But if at last our colour should be torn from Ireland's heart,
Our sons with shame and sorrow from this dear old isle will part;
I've heard a whisper of a land that lies beyond the sea
20 Where rich and poor stand equal in the light of freedom's day.
O Erin⁴, must we leave you driven by a tyrant's hand?
Must we ask a mother's blessing from a strange and distant land?
Where the cruel cross of England shall nevermore be seen,
And where, please God, we'll live and die still wearing of the green!

¹ *Trod*: past tense of tread, which means to step, walk, or trample so as to press, crush, or injure something.

² *Verdure*: greenness, especially of fresh, flourishing vegetation; also, freshness in general; flourishing condition; vigor.

³ *Caubeen*: an Irish beret formerly worn by peasants but now currently used as the head dress for Irish regiments of the British military.

⁴ *Erin*: Poets and nineteenth-century Irish nationalists used Erin as a Romantic name for Ireland; it is derivative of the Irish Gaelic word, "Éirinn". "Éirinn go brách" (in standard orthography), a slogan dating from the 1798 revolution, is often translated as "Ireland forever"

Dion Boucicault was, despite his French name, an Irishman born in Dublin, a playwright. At the time, inspired by America's successful revolution against British rule, many Irish thought the time was ripe for independence. The colour green became a symbol of sympathy for Irish independence, and the British actually began executing persons found wearing anything of the colour green.

The pen, however, is mightier than the sword, and this powerful poem was the response. Napper Tandy, mentioned in the poem, was in fact a shopkeeper in Dublin who, having been identified by the British as a freedom fighter, had to flee to France. And Boucicault himself fled the country, coming to America as the words of his poem itself echo prophetic.

Boucicault did not stop writing plays, poetry and music on his arrival in New York. One of his better-known works, written over a century ago, is the well-known song, *Sidewalks of New York*.