

The Legend of Northland

by Phoebe Cary

Focus Spot

Background:

What is a legend? Why is this poem called a legend?

A legend is an old, traditional and popular story which is considered to be historical but its authenticity is not attested.

This poem is a legend because it is a ‘curious’ and conventional story narrated to the children of the Northland. Apart from that, the story’s authenticity also cannot be verified owing to the presence of the supernatural elements at the end of tale.

Who is Saint Peter?

Saint Peter was one of the twelve disciples (followers) of Jesus Christ. Peter became the first head of the Christian Church, probably because he was Jesus’s first disciple. All the Popes of the Church as considered to be the descendants of Peter.

For reference, the most renowned church in the Vatican City St. Peter’s Basilica is named after Saint Peter.

Explanation of the Poem:

Once Saint Peter stopped by an old lady’s cottage as he was feeling hungry and weak after the day’s fasting and travel. The lady was baking cakes on the hearth. When Saint Peter asked her for one of her cakes, she tried to make a tiny cake for him. But as it was baking, she found it to be too large to be given away.

She tried baking twice more but even the smallest of cakes seemed too large to her. Such greedy and selfish behaviour of the lady annoyed the hungry Saint. He cursed her saying that she was way too selfish to be a human, to have food, shelter and fire to keep her warm.

She was thus immediately transformed into a woodpecker. All her clothes except her scarlet cap were gone as she went up the chimney and flew out of the top. It is said that every country schoolboy has seen her in the forest, boring into the wood for food till date.