

The Red Hand of Ulster



From **Ripley's Believe It or Not** (1953)

The strangest victory in all history!

Heremon O'Neill racing a rival chieftain for possession of Ireland became the first man to touch its soil by cutting off his own hand and hurling it ashore!

His sacrifice made Heremon the first king of Ulster! 1015 B.C.

The RED HAND OF ULSTER is still the province's coat of arms 2,968 years later!

That makes for an interesting tale, but is there any truth to it?

The early legend of the cutting off of the left hand, and throwing it ashore does not seem to be historically accurate, for the same story appears in many places, and is not borne out by the fact that the O'Neills, Kings of Ulster, and all branches of that princely house invariably used the right hand as do the present representatives. All the early seals of the O'Neills have the right hand - never the left.

The reason of the confusion as to right or left hand appears to have arisen in this way: On the institution of the Order of Baronets of Ulster by King James I 'a hand gules' was adopted as the badge of the new Order (right or left not specified). A dexter or a sinister hand was used indiscriminately by the baronets for some time, but gradually settled down exclusively to the sinister hand - the ancient legend apparently carrying the day as regards the badge of the baronetcy.

As the badge of the province, however, the dexter is the right hand and is by authority so recorded in Ulster's Office. Therefore the badge of the province - 'The Red Hand of O'Neill' - argent a dexter hand gules - is authoritatively settled beyond dispute. "There should be no drops blood."

The Biblical version:

Jacob/Israel's fourth son, who was called Judah, had twin sons called Zarah and Pharez, recorded in [Genesis 38: 28-30](#). When the twins were due to be born Zarah put his hand out of the womb and the midwife tied a "Red Cord" around his wrist to mark the first-born and his birthright. However, Zarah of the "Red-Hand" pulled his hand back and his brother Pharez was born first and so breached Zarah's birthright and was therefore named Pharez meaning breach in Hebrew.

Because Zarah lost his birthright he went into exile to Iberia (Heberia - the Hebrew's land) and built Zaragossa ("Stronghold of Zarah"). Later on the Israelites' traditional enemy Babylon and then Rome ([the New Babylon](#)) invaded Iberia (Spain) and drove the Zarahites of the "Red-Hand" to the North of Spain to Galicia and Vizcaya (Biscay) and many left Heberia (Iberia) and sailed to Hibernia (Hebernia - the Hebrew's new land) - Ireland.

Whichever you believe:

"The Red Hand of Ulster's a paradox quite,
To Baronets 'tis said to belong;
If they use the left hand, they're sure to be right,
And to use the right hand would be wrong.
For the Province, a different custom applies,
And just the reverse is the rule;
If you use the right hand you'll be right, safe and wise,
If you use the left hand you're a fool."