

PENTAGRAM

(4) AUGUST 1965

A WITCHCRAFT REVIEW

TWO SHILLINGS

EDITORIAL

WITH THIS, our fourth issue, we can now look back—albeit with somewhat mixed feelings—on a year of publication. Readers will, we hope, forgive us a moment of reflection. Throughout its brief existence *Pentagram* has sought to sound out the feelings and ideas of the many hundreds now sharing the wakening interest in the whole subject of Witchcraft and to present the views of those who care to express them. It has endeavoured to do so in a quiet and dignified manner: without undue publicity or ballyhoo—both of which could easily have been obtained and, probably, would have made it a remarkably successful publication from a commercial standpoint.

It is impossible to cater for all tastes but among those objects we set ourselves was that of showing that the Craft is still a vital and living entity of indisputable antiquity. We believe we have achieved this and, if so, our thanks are due to those who have helped us by their writings.

As the Alchemist Jean d'Espagnet said "... truth lies hid in obscurity: for the philosophers never write more deceitfully than when plainly, nor ever more truly than obscurely." So it has been with some of our contributors, who have left much to be read between the lines. The popular commentators on Witchcraft have seldom bothered with the truly mystical or symbolic side of their subject; such would not sell books or magazines—let alone the Sunday newspapers. This side of the Craft lies the deepest hidden and takes the longest search to find.

We have endeavoured to maintain a balance between the spiritual and the practical and we have had no complaints so far. Many of our readers will, we know, take what comes; but our future is in the balance. We are committed to another issue to honour our obligations to our many subscribers but for *Pentagram* to continue (in some modified form, perhaps) there must be a fair number who are prepared to write lines for us—and sometimes to read between them.

THE FAITH OF THE WISE

Our controversial contributor, who can trace his family's Witch connections back to 1734, reveals something of the mystical side of his beliefs

It is said by various "authorities" that the Faith of the Wise, when they do believe in its existence, is a simple matter: a pre-Christian religion, based upon whatever Gods and Goddesses are the current vogue—full of simple, hearty peasants doing simple, hearty peasant-like things... things that in some cases complex, nervous sophisticates also enjoy doing in urban parlours. Consequently we have an interesting phenomenon: civilised sophisticates running round behaving like simple peasants—and simple peasants who have never heard of such things! It is also maintained by the same "authorities" that we follow a belief which, as one dear old fellow put it, is headed by a deity "Who is the sweetest woman, everyone loves her."

To quote someone else who is just a student of the Craft, "Witchcraft is about rituals," which I suppose to be true, if one cares to accept the definition as witchcraft.

All this worries me, somewhat—since

I am not a peasant and neither am I particularly interested in being led by a sweet woman, and ritual to me is merely a means to an end. So what is the Faith all about? Admittedly I can only speak for myself, and what I write here are my own opinions, but here goes.

Unfortunately for authorities, students and "mere seekers after truth," the Faith is not about anything that has been written above. The Faith is finally concerned with Truth, total Truth. It is one of the oldest of religions, and also one of the most potent, bringing as it does, Man into contact with Gods, and Man into contact with Self. As such the Faith is a way of life different and distinct from any theory promulgated by the authorities or historians. Within the disciplines of the Faith, man may offer devotion to the Gods, and receive certain knowledge of Their existence by participation in something of the perfected Nature of Godhead, recalling that both within and without which is most true. The Faith is a belief

concerned with the inner nature of devotion, and finally with the nature of mysticism and mystical experience. It has, in common with all great religions, an inner experience that is greater than the exterior world. It is a discipline that creates from the world an enriched inward vision. It can and does embrace the totality of human experience from birth to death, then beyond. It creates within the human spirit a light that brightens all darkness, and which can never again be extinguished. It is never fully forgotten and never fully remembered. The True Faith is the life of the follower, without it he is nothing, with it he has contained something of all creation.

Force requires form at this level of being, therefore ritual exists to contain that force. Godhead demands worship, therefore ritual exists to give and formulate that worship. Man needs help, therefore ritual is designed to give that help. It is possible to comprehend Godhead or Force without ritual, since the First Principle of Godhead is present at all levels and in all things at all times—but total perception is not present in humanity all the time. Therefore ritual basically becomes a matter of increasing perception until something of Godhead is finally revealed, and that which is within and without is partially understood: comprehended in the spirit, the mind and in the physical person of the participant until it becomes one with his total being. The forces comprehended are part of the living person, incorporated into everyday life as part of a spiritual, mental and physical discipline that returns the devotee again and again to the original Source.

Devotion requires proof. Therefore that proof exists within the disciplines of the Faith. The nature of proof cannot be explained, since force can only be shown by inference and by participation, not by intellectual reasoning. The nature of the proof falls into many forms, but amongst the most common are these:

(a) *Poetic Vision*, in which the participant has inward access to dream images and symbols. This is the result of the unconscious being stimulated by various means. Images are taught as part of a tradition, and also exist (as Jung speculated) upon their own levels. They are, when interpreted properly, means by which a lesser part of truth may be understood.

(b) *The Vision of Memory*, in which the devotee not only remembers past existence but also, at times, a past perfection.

(c) *Magical Vision*, in which the participant undertakes by inference part of a Triad of service, and therefore contacts certain levels.*

(d) *Religious Vision*, in which the worshipper is allowed admission to the True Godhead for a short time. This is a part of *true* initiation, and the results of devotion towards a mystical aim.

(e) *Mystical Vision*, in which the servant enters into divine union with the Godhead. This state has no form, being a point where force alone is present.

These are *proofs*, since having enjoined with such forces, there cannot afterwards be any doubts as to the nature of the experience. Man suffers from doubt at all times, but to the participant in such experience, the doubt centres around the reality of the external world, not the inner. The reality of such experience illuminates the whole life.

Therefore it can be shown that the Faith is a complex philosophy, dealing finally with the nature of Truth, Experience and Devotion. It requires discipline and work, plus utter and complete devotion to the common aim.

It can only be fulfilled by service, some labours taking many years to complete. The Faith tolerates no nonsense, and

those who would come to it, must come empty-handed saying "I know nothing, I seek everything," since within the structure of the Faith, all things may be contained and are contained. It has survived, in secrecy and silence, the attacks of persecution, indifference and misrepresentation. It is secret because those only who are best suited may enter the awful silences of the Places of the Gods. It is silent because in silence there is strength, protection and a future. It is also silent today, because as the Greeks said "Those whom the Gods would destroy, they first make mad." It is nearly impossible to enter unless the supplicant shows unmistakable signs of past memory and a genuine mystical drive, and is willing to undertake tests that will force him finally to disclose that matter which is most secret to himself. The Faith has no secrets in the sense that there are formulas which can be readily understood and taught. It is finally and utterly the *True Faith*, standing immovable beyond space, time and all human matters.—ROBERT COCHRANE.

* Being requested by the Editor to clarify this statement I ask the interested reader to examine the Hebrew letters IHV as they would be in their original and matriarchal form, which will explain something of the basic nature of magical rite and ritual. It should be as clear as the Roebuck in the Thicket now.

A WOOD IN THE WEST COUNTRY

Sacred place still used for initiations

In the West Country, and I shall be no more explicit geographically than that, there is a wood that covers three or four acres of ground. It is known locally as "Annie's Wood" and is strongly reputed to be haunted. In these few facts there is nothing really out of the ordinary, and certainly little to stimulate the imagination of any student of the Old Religion. The wood, however, is a sacred spot to a small group of those who still owe their allegiance to The Lady, and this stimulates the mind instantly.

The wood is used mainly as a spot for initiations when aspirant members of this hereditary group are deemed ready to learn something of the mysteries. But there is no trace of the Gardnerian cloak and dagger initiation here, no binding, no oath-taking or flagellation. The aspirant, after being prepared mentally by his or her sponsor, and drinking of the potion, is left alone to spend the night by the three stones that stand overgrown in the centre of the wood. Anyone who has even walked in an English wood at night will readily appreciate that to spend the night there, alone, is a test for only those secure in their genuine desire to serve and, holding on to this desire, unafraid of what they may see. The inquisition on the following day by experienced Elders will determine whether the aspirant stays permanently on the fringe of the group or assumes his heritage.

Now all this is interesting, but the really interesting thing is the story that is told as to why the wood is haunted. The versions vary slightly; this one is contained in a 17th-century book on the area prepared by the local priest. Long ago, they say, there was a woman living on the hill at the foot of which the wood sprawls. She was neither young nor beautiful but men loved her. She was, however, evil and would give her favours to any man. But any man who went into the wood with her was in danger of his life because once a year, while the man she had favoured was sleeping beside her, she would change into a cat and tear his throat out. Eventually she was slain by a monk who wore a magic crucifix that was proof against her charms. The monk burned down her hut and buried her beneath three rocks that he magically raised up to keep her buried.

This story is a fascinating one—although as it stands it is bunkum. Any story wherein a monk or any sort of cleric goes up against what the story calls evil is a pretty clear case of Christianity versus the Old Religion, and this is no exception. Let us look at the name of the wood first—"Annie's Wood." This, I think, is a clear corruption over the years of "Annis Wood," so let us call it "The Wood of Annis," and daylight begins to show—for Annis is a name of the old Goddess (in Leicestershire she was "Black Annis," but "Anna" and "Ang-

nesse" are all the same name). So we have, I postulate, a priestess of the Goddess living, rightly, at the top of a hill with a sacred wood below who would take a man—a younger man most certainly—as her lover, probably for a year, and murder him as Divine King, probably in midsummer. The alleged method of murder is interesting, as is the transformation into a cat, for Annis is also known as "Cat Annis" although her symbol is more normally an owl. The slaying by the monk is obviously a way of saying that Christianity suppressed the worship of Annis and took over. The raising of the stones is nonsense since they are still there today, are of very great antiquity and form, I think, part of a circle now almost all buried under earth and grass. They ought, I suppose, to be excavated for all to see but the thought of their desecration by the hordes such as descend on Stonehenge would be too much to bear.

One more link in this interesting chain: the deed to the land on which the wood stands gives as an alternative name for it "Three Sisters Wood"—though I know of nobody who uses it now. The most obvious three sisters that spring to mind are the Fate-Trinity, Ana, Badb and Macha—known collectively as the "Morrigan" or "Great Queen." They are, as Robert Cochrane has pointed out, the true object(s) of the Witch's worship.

As a postscript I may say that among the people who regard the wood as sacred there are a quite disproportionate number of "Annes" and "Agneses." There's an unconscious race-memory for you!—TALIESIN.

"The Druid"

The Druid Order (the old one, that is) will shortly be publishing a litho-duplicated magazine; contents to include Druidry, folk-lore, folk-medicine, poetry, archaeology, etc. Price 3s. per copy from *The Druid*, 77 Calton Avenue, London, S.E.21.

A Remarkable Publication

A WITCH'S SECRET WRITINGS; "Tiberius"; Occult Publications.

Several of our readers have replied to an advertisement in a monthly publication and have received a prospectus for this book. The introductory leaflet is couched in enthusiastic and hard-selling terms and the order form requires the purchaser to enter into an undertaking not to reveal the contents and your reviewer has no intention of doing so. The "Secret Writings" are, in fact, handwritten; it is impossible to pass judgement. Many who buy will be disappointed; for others it may mark the beginning of a new era. Any reader who wishes to explore further can obtain the address of Occult Publications from *Pentagram*.

THE ROLLRIGHT STONES IN USE

*A clairvoyant who visited the ancient circle records
his impressions of their original purpose*

Despite most unfavourable weather conditions, a visit earlier this year to the Rollright Stones produced a certain amount of information from psychic sources. This is not guaranteed as accurate, but is of considerable interest, since it seems entirely new.

In the first place, the Circle itself was seen as a solid perimeter wall wherein members of families and clans for miles around met at intervals for business and social contacts. While there, they were bound to observe peace from personal feuds and abstention from violence. This they swore by the King Stone, before they entered the circled enclosure. To break such an oath meant death.

To the Inner vision, they appeared a smallish folk, very brown of complexion, wearing mostly leather and fur clothing, their whole appearance being slightly reminiscent of South American tribesmen.

Apart from their jollifications and dealings with commerce and politics in the Circle, which seemed to take up their purely secular activities, there was a solemn religious practice of communion with their God or Gods which looked grim, but fascinating. This had nothing to do with the Circle, but took place at the odd Cromlech now known as the Whispering Knights—five large stones close together, some with holes. They seemed very different long ago. Then, they were the central chamber of a large beehive structure of stones and turves. There was a small entrance hole, and holes leading to the outside somewhere near the top of the mound. It was the Dwelling-place of the God.

What happened was that a selected medium was immured *alive* in that small chamber and, when a state of lucid trance was reached, would speak with the voice of the "God" which could be heard outside the mound by those who squatted there awaiting the "Message."

A very old woman was seen, being carefully pushed through the little hole at the base of the cromlech which was then closed up. She seemed drugged or tranced, and carried a strange rattle made from a skull with either stones or bones inside.

Once inside the tomb-like chamber, dark and smelly, scarcely ventilated, possibly fume-laden, the crone would undoubtedly give vent to all sorts of utterances which would be heard via the connecting holes. The voice would be distorted, and the meaning highly uncertain. Nevertheless, the tribesmen accepted them as the authentic decrees of their Divinity. The chances are that such

messages really did come through psychic contacts with their Group-Soul level, and were indeed of value.

It did not seem as if the medium were intended to die there, though this must sometimes have happened. Another point appeared that the inquirers of the Oracle were not in the least concerned with any kind of metaphysical problem, but all their queries were centred around such mundane topics as harvests, battles, marriage issues, elections of Elders, and so forth. None were even interested in the "Spirit World" as such. Their demands on the Otherworld were entirely on behalf of this one.

Thus it would seem that the "Whispering Knights" were indeed a source of whispering—from the Pythoness inside. How long she remained at a time can only be guessed, but it seemed that it might even be days until she collapsed from hunger and exhaustion. Who knows? May be the "Knights" were once a local Delphic Oracle, consulted far and wide.

The Holed Stone, in its turn, became a Sacred Symbol as a contact point between God and Man. Even today they are considered lucky. In primitive times, someone probably discovered the secret of the drop of water held by a small hole in a stone. It could be used as a burning-lens to condense the Sun's rays and start a fire. A Magical act indeed then, and a secret to be closely guarded.

Modern mediums do things more comfortably, but it is questionable whether the "messages" they hand out are of any greater value to us than those of long ago, uttered from the lips of an old woman sealed in a queer Pyramid high up on the Cotswolds. Her people had feasted and feted her in the communal Circle. Then they took her to the silent House of the Gods, and made her His guest for a while so that they could meet Him on a half-way ground. He must have said *something* to His (or Her) people, otherwise they wouldn't have continued the practice.

This was as far as investigation would allow during one visit. It is hoped to continue later.—WM. G. GRAY.

Proposed expedition cancelled

Although about 30 readers expressed interest in *Pentagram's* proposed trip(s) to the Rollright Stones and the Museum at Bourton-on-the-Water, the preferences for Saturday/Sunday meant that insufficient numbers would be available to make an economic expedition on either day. Our apologies to all concerned—we are as disappointed as you.

A HANDBOOK ON WITCHES;
Gillian Tindall; Arthur Barker; 21s.

Already extensively reviewed in the newspapers and literary magazines, Miss Tindall's book is a first-class round-up of a plethora of historical information agreeably bound together with some original and constructive thinking. She says little about (and has little time for) contemporary "witchcraft." Considering the facts she has to judge by she is reasonably suspicious: "... They are normally at great pains to emphasise that though they dance around naked there is nothing 'nasty' (i.e. sexual) about their meetings, and one lady who spoke on *Woman's Hour* made it sound extra-respectable by pronouncing 'coven' with a long 'o'—surely a genteelism comparable with calling a scene a 'scene'?" Some of these people are no doubt sincere; they probably have a natural taste, or even aptitude, for occult matters, and ritual witchcraft is simply the channel through which they choose to express this. But one cannot help wondering why, if sincere, they continue to use—even to revel in—the name 'witch' with its sensational connotations of evil and retribution? The roots of their belief—if genuine belief it is—lie much farther back in time than the famous covens and trials that have formed the witch-image of folklore. Also, it is clear that some of them do enjoy and even promote, a certain amount of idiotic publicity for themselves."

In many ways this is one of the most interesting books that have appeared on the subject for a long time. Not only is there a wealth of collected historical detail but the recurring tidbits (her explanation of the phrase "baker's dozen" for example) will induce many to look more closely at many things that are unthinkingly and unquestioningly accepted today. And while her explanations—in psychological terms—may not be fully acceptable to either the bigoted or the hereditary viewpoint, in many respects she may well have written more truly than she knew.

Clearly the slight references to "witchcraft" today are based on a virtual lack of first-hand knowledge—not that the contemporary scene comes more than fleetingly within the proper province of her book—but the lesson is there for all to see. If present-day "witches" (of the black, white or "publicity" varieties—to quote a recent correspondent to the *Daily Telegraph*) resent being misrepresented they probably have no one to blame but themselves. What Miss Tindall set out to do she has done both charmingly and readably.—MATHEW BOVARY.

Gypsy Healing

The August issue of *Prediction* contains an article by Barbara Cartland on "Gypsy Healing." All who are interested in folk-medicine will find it well worth reading.

WITCH-BALLS EXAMINED

Whatever their origin and purpose, witch-balls have always held a fascination for the collector

How often in the dark recesses of some quaint old shop the searcher for antiques finds a witch-ball hanging!

It may be a globe of shining silver, that mirrors all the scene in its round, or darts a reflected ray of sunlight from the street. Or it may be a hollow ball of many-coloured glass, with a bright swirl of different hues, transparent in the light.

The multi-coloured glass balls are usually fairly small; but the reflecting balls can be huge, and heavy enough to need a chain to hang them by. The biggest one I have ever seen used to be on display in a shop in the Brighton Lanes, and a photograph of it illustrates one of R. Thurston Hopkins' books of ghost stories.

The reflecting witch-balls have been known in Britain since Elizabethan times; but the coloured glass ones are later, and were a speciality of the famous Nailsea glassmakers of the West Country.

There are different explanations of how they came to be called witch-balls. My own opinion is that they were mainly intended as a protection against the dreaded "evil eye."

The belief that the eye of an evilly-disposed person could convey an influence of malignity with its steady glance is very old, and world-wide. In this country, the evil eye as a power of black witchcraft was implicitly believed in, and in some places it still is.

All kinds of charms and amulets were devised to protect people from it. Such amulets often involved a mazy pattern of twisting lines, to divert the evil glance so that it followed them instead of falling directly upon the person. Sometimes the amulet consisted of some startling device, such as the Gorgon's head, which glared back at the ill-wisher.

In these devices we can see the origins of both kinds of the witch-ball. The shiny, reflecting globe flung back the glance of the evil eye upon the person who sent it forth. For this reason the reflecting witch-ball was often hung in the front windows of old houses; and it was retained as a decoration when its original purpose had been forgotten.

Some time back I was given a very old witch-ball that came from an old house in a Sussex village. This consists of a hollow sphere of thick glass, slightly greenish in colour. It has a small hole, plugged with a cork; and inside is a mass of teased-out threads of different colours. It must have taken someone long ago a great deal of patience to introduce thread after thread through the little hole, until the ball was filled.

The effect, however, is of a swirl and

maze of different colours; and when the Nailsea glassmakers started their famous manufacture, in 1788, in my opinion this is the pattern they copied in making witch-balls of coloured glass.

From late in the 17th century glass-makers had been producing hollow glass globes, or globular bottles, for people to hang up in their houses as a protection against evil influences. Devout Christians filled them with holy water. Others, like the maker of my example from Sussex, preferred the old device of the mazy threads and twining colours to divert the evil eye.

It was believed that the glass ball would attract to itself all the influences of ill-luck and ill-health that would otherwise have fallen upon the household. So every morning the ball would be carefully wiped clean, to wipe the evil away.

The Nailsea glassmakers produced all kinds of fancy articles, which were sold at country markets and fairs. People bought the many-coloured witch-balls to give to their friends and relatives as presents. They were regarded as luck-bringers as well as protective amulets; and some people call them "wish-balls," because they were given with a wish for good luck and prosperity.

The bright reflecting globes were also sometimes called "watch-balls," the idea being that if you watched them long enough the mirrored scene in them would fade out, and change into a visionary picture. Some authorities consider these names to have been corrupted into "witch-balls;" but I think they are merely variants of the term "witch-ball," as both ideas are connected with witchcraft.

The bright mirror globes were originally imported from the Continent. They are often depicted in old Dutch paintings. However, from about 1690 English glass-makers started producing them, and their products were less fragile than the Continental ones. The early silvered witch-balls were coated inside with an amalgam containing bismuth, lead, tin and mercury. They were not very durable, as the reflection was liable to damage by damp; nor were they very clear.

Later, in the early 19th century, improved methods of manufacture were

evolved, including one of coating the glass inside with real silver; and in this period very fine reflecting globes were made, of mirror-like perfection. Coloured witch-balls of this type began to be made also. I have seen them in blue, green and gold, as well as in silver.

In fact, in the 19th century the witch-ball began to be more of a decoration, and its old magical significance faded into the background. Witch-balls were made with everything on them from Scriptural texts to hunting scenes.

But their original significance has not been forgotten. In 1930 *The Times* had some interesting correspondence on the survival of belief in witchcraft. One writer mentioned that she had seen witch-balls for sale in a shop near the British Museum, and had been told that there was a ready sale for them. They were believed to turn aside the effects of witchcraft.

Incidentally, *The Times* received so many letters on the belief in witchcraft that on September 20th, 1930, it published a leading article on the subject, in which it was stated "It is plain that in many a village (and in many a town, too, perhaps) the belief in witchcraft has by no means died out, and that living women are believed by some of their neighbours to be witches."

Today, witch-balls are becoming collectors' pieces, and even museum pieces; but such is their popularity that new ones are beginning to be made. Not long ago I saw some in a Brighton shop, of bright silvered glass, hung from a little wrought-iron wall bracket. I wonder if the purchasers want them only for decoration, or if their lucky and magical significance is still in mind?—DOREEN VALIENTE.

Weather Query

Can anyone shed any light on the fact that *some* people find that the day after they clean their cars it *always* rains? Our inquirer, far from believing that he is gifted with power over the elements, suggests that there is something in the "atmosphere" about 24 hours before a summer storm which gives him the urge to clean his car. Perhaps it is the same force or influence which makes cows behave differently in advance of a change in the weather; please let us have your views.

Personal Announcements

Subscribers who would like to make their own contacts by correspondence with other readers are invited to submit brief "Personal column" announcements for publication free of charge. As this is intended to be a service to further individual research, no announcements for goods for sale will be accepted—except in the case of books: titles and prices must be specified.

PENTAGRAM

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