

PENTAGRAM

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A WITCHCRAFT REVIEW

TWO SHILLINGS

Great Welcome for "Pentagram"

RESPONSE from those to whom the first issue of *Pentagram* was sent has been enthusiastic and a great encouragement to those responsible for its production. Recommendation by word of mouth and other incidental publicity have ensured a steady stream of inquiries and subsequent subscriptions.

Pentagram intends to develop as an independent newsletter and general forum for the exchange of news and views. It can fulfil the great need for a regular source of information for the thousands who are interested in any aspect of Witchcraft studies.

Before Gardner — What?

A correspondent writes to say that from studying newspaper cuttings covering the past few years it would seem "that the entire world of English Witchcraft is made up of a limited number of persons, whom one might term as Dr. Gardner's discoveries. Some eight ladies and three to four men. This happy band turn up time and time again. Now as you must know, there are a number of other groups, quite apart from the little group in which I am interested, who practice various forms of Magic and Witchcraft. Now why does the Press make no mention of them...? All I can say for the Believers in Witchcraft, is that it is high time that steps were taken to alter (the existing) public image. For it does no good at all to anyone, and I think that you know it in your heart."

Part of the purpose of *Pentagram* is

to provide the means of obtaining a more realistic appreciation of the overall situation. Members of several hereditary covens have signified their willingness to provide material about their traditional beliefs and practices—but not yet. They deny that Witchcraft is "a simple religion for simple folk"—a popular belief—and maintain that it is a complicated and all-embracing way of life requiring study, determination and a rare attitude of mind and discipline of spirit.

There are other newspapers besides the *News of the World* and there are other authors than Dennis Wheatley. A number of perfectly responsible researchers, writers and authors could help to change the image of Witchcraft but obviously can only do so as a result of their own findings. If the only people they are able to trace tell them one view, that will be the view which is published.

us some self-appointed Witchfinders General. More and more the old Craft of the Wise is gaining recognition as a genuine tradition of nature-worship and magic, deserving of its title "The Old Religion".

One of the important aspects of the Craft of the Wise, or the tradition of White Witchcraft as it is commonly called, is that it is a British tradition. Indeed, it exists all over Western Europe; and it has been taken by emigrants in times past to America, Australia and New Zealand.

It seems to be part of the British national character to be excessively modest about that which is our own. If anything like the great open-air temples of Stonehenge and Avebury, for instance, existed somewhere in the East, or in Egypt, they would be objects of wonder to pilgrims from this country. They would be regarded as clear evidence of the existence of a great mystic tradition. But because these and similar things exist in our own land, they have for too long been dismissed by Britons as mere relics of a barbarous past.

The ancient history of Britain was not as barbarous as all that. The pagan traditions of our native land are something to be proud of, and something which is well worth investigating.

Do not let us dismiss our ancestors too easily as simple people, because they did not have 20th-century civilisation. A member of the Sangha, a Buddhist monk of today, may be a very simple man, in that he does not own a Cadillac or a washing machine or a television set. In fact, all he does own in this world is three cotton robes, a razor, a begging bowl, a pair of sandals, and perhaps an umbrella and a few other small things. Yet his mind may be able to grasp metaphysical ideas which are quite beyond the comprehension of the owners of Cadillacs and washing machines.

And so it was with the priests and priestesses of the Old Religion which has come down to us from ancient times as Witchcraft. It is something which is at once simple and profound.

"It is a maxim in magic that all the gods are one God, and all the goddesses are one Goddess, and there is one Initiator." With this saying of Dion Fortune's in mind, we will consider

FIFTY AT "PENTAGRAM" DINNER

Precisely 50 subscribers and their friends attended the first *Pentagram* dinner in London on October 3, details of which were sent out to all who indicated an interest in the project. Those present to hear Mrs. Doreen Valiente's interesting talk came from as far afield as Derby, Wolverhampton and Harwich.

Grace before dinner was a translation of a 12th-century document of unknown origin:

*Answer us, O Ancient Horned One.
Provender and Power are Thine.
Hear and answer, Gracious Goddess,
Grant us laughter, wit, and wine.
Descend on us, O Thou of blessings,
Come among us, make us glad.
Since Thou art Chief of our Creation,
Why, O why, should we be sad?
Beam on us, O joyous Bacchus,
Banish heavy-hearted hate.*

*Accept our Craft, O Greatest Mother,
Let cheerful brightness be our fate.
SO MAY IT BE.*

Her friendly charm quickly endeared Mrs. Valiente to her audience, and the following is an extract from her speech:

Friends, first of all may I thank you for the honour you have done me in choosing me as your speaker, on what may well be an historic first occasion—the first gathering organised by *Pentagram*.

It is, I feel sure, significant that it is just thirteen years—the witches' mystic thirteen—since the last of the old Witchcraft Acts was taken off the Statute Book, in 1951. Before that time, our assembly tonight might have been illegal; and if we had held it in the 17th century it would have been a hanging matter.

People are no longer hanged for Witchcraft, although we still have with

(continued overleaf)

"Pentagram" Dinner (continued)

briefly what has come down to us of the traditional beliefs of the witch religion.

Most people here tonight will know that our cult-groups are called covens; but it is a popular misconception that a coven must consist of thirteen people. It can be of any number up to thirteen; but when the ideal number of thirteen is reached, those over that number branch off and form a new coven.

The number thirteen is connected with the Moon Goddess, because there are thirteen lunar months in the year. The Moon Goddess is the personification of Nature as the Great Mother; and as such, she is the most ancient of goddesses, and her worship goes back to the beginnings of man's life on earth. The oldest religious objects ever found are statuettes of the Mother Goddess; and I think people have a deep need to recognise and worship the feminine side of Deity, which orthodox religion has failed to satisfy.

The four Greater Sabbats of the witch faith also go back beyond recorded history. One of them, Hallowe'en, will soon be with us. It is the time when we remember in particular those who have passed before us through the Gates of the Beyond; and we greet them, not in fear or in mourning, but in friendship. This is the origin of the traditions of Hallowe'en; and each quarter we celebrate one of the Greater Sabbats, the other three of which are Candlemas, May Eve and Lammas. Candlemas is the time of the first signs of spring; May Eve is the beginning of summer; and Lammas is the time of harvest.

The needs of today

What witches seek for in celebrating these seasonal rituals is a sense of oneness with Nature, and the exhilaration which comes from contact with the One Universal Life. People today need this, because they are conscious of the tendency of modern life to cut them off from their kinship with the world of living nature; until their own individuality is smoothed and processed away, and they begin to feel as if they are just another cog in a huge, senseless machine.

It is the reaction against this feeling which is attracting people's interest in Witchcraft today. They want to get back to Nature, and be human beings again, as she intended them to be.

Witches do not go about trying to convert people; but we keep the lamp of the Old Religion burning, for those who wish to see by its light.

Most people here will know, too, that witches worship the ancient pagan deity we call the Horned God; and that for this reason they were accused of worshipping the devil. This would be rather

difficult—for the witches I know, at any rate—because I have yet to find one of them who believes in the devil, in that sense.

The Horned God of the witches is perhaps most easily conceived to us as being rather like Pan, who was indeed the goatfoot god of the witches of Thessaly. We have had some learned gentlemen recently telling us that Witchcraft is a post-Christian invention of the Middle Ages. I don't know how these good folk account for the existence of the witch-cult of Thessaly, in Ancient Greece, long before Christianity was ever heard of; but I have no doubt they could account to their own satisfaction for almost anything, if they talked long enough!

However, I think we should recognise that Witchcraft as we have it today is the synthesis of the traditions of many centuries. And it is still a living and evolving tradition, and capable of yet further evolution as the human race itself evolves.

Our worship of the Horned God and of the Moon Goddess may well be on a more spiritual level today than it was in centuries past. In the past, the cult needed to work for material fertility, because without it the people faced starvation. Today, we can take a broader conception of the witch cult as a cult of fertility. We can work for fertility of the mind, and fertility of the soul.

Fertility of the earth

And is this not what people today desperately need, with the forces of denaturing materialism on the one hand, and of an orthodox religion which can no longer satisfy them on the other?

At the same time, when we recollect the hungry millions of the world, I think we should also sometimes invoke the Ancient Powers with one of the most ancient of all prayers, for the fertility of the earth, that there should be less people hungry in the world. This is regularly done at Witchcraft meetings in Sussex, where I come from, and I hope that perhaps other covens may feel inclined to do this also.

Fertility is one another way of expressing the forces of Life itself; and the idea that the spirit of Life is divine is something that is common to all religions.

Witches are humble enough to recognise that Divinity, the source of all life, is necessarily beyond human comprehension. Contact with Divinity is what the mystic experiences; but when we start trying to define and dogmatise, we merely reveal our human limitations.

So we recognise that we, being human and limited, need images in order to bring Divinity nearer to our perception. The Horned God and the Moon Goddess are magical images, in this sense; and they are probably the eldest in the world,

the most anciently established in the Collective Unconscious of humanity, the great Treasure House of Images. The Horned God represents the masculine aspect of Divinity, and the Moon Goddess the feminine aspect.

True Religion and true Magic are not opposed to each other, but complementary. Both depend upon the contact and inter-penetration of the material world and the Unseen.

Cone of power

There is still a great deal to learn about the actual techniques used by witches, in the psychic and magical side of the cult. For instance, witches have for many years been speaking of "The Cone of Power". It has only been in recent times that this auric emanation has been studied and demonstrated, by Mr. T. C. Lethbridge in his book "Ghost and Divining Rod", and he has shown it to be exactly what the witches said it was—an invisible but demonstrable cone of force surrounding living beings and even inanimate objects.

The practice of scrying, or crystal-gazing, as it is often called, is a very interesting branch of witch magic. Actually, all sorts of different things were and are used by witches as scrying instruments, and many of them can be seen in the two Witchcraft Museums, at Castletown, Isle of Man, and Bourton-on-the-Water in Gloucestershire. This means of obtaining visions brings us into the mysterious realm of precognition, or foreseeing events before they happen. I have experienced this myself in a witches' circle, so I know that it can take place; and I hope others will experiment.

Psychic healing is something else that witches have traditionally practised; and probably the people of olden times knew far more about it than we do today. It is often referred to as "faith healing"; but I don't believe that belonging to a particular religious faith has anything to do with it. I have heard of healing being performed successfully by African witch-doctors, British witches, and Kahunas of the South Sea Islands, as well as people of more orthodox religions.

The old white witch practice of charming warts is really a form of psychic healing; and even doctors have to admit that it works, though they don't know how.

Margaret Murray drew the distinction between what she called Operative Witchcraft, the use of charms and spells, the practice of magic; and Ritual Witchcraft, which is the religious beliefs and rituals of the Old Religion. While not agreeing myself with all of Margaret Murray's conclusions, I think we should pay tribute to her for her great contribution to the serious study of Witchcraft as the remains of pagan religion. She

was an original thinker and researcher, which is more than can be said for most other critics.

I think we should pay tribute tonight also to the late Dr. Gerald Gardner, for the great contribution he made to the renewal of interest in the survival of the old Craft of the Wise. I do not by any means agree with all that Gerald Gardner said or did; but I recognise his great qualities of heart and mind, as did all who knew him. He was a personality and a character, and we shall remember him with affection.

The name of Gerald Gardner is so much associated with Witchcraft in the present day, that he has even been paid the back-handed compliment of having the allegation made that he invented it! I think I need only say in this connection that if people will believe that, they will believe anything.

Pentagram is now contacting surviving traditions from covens which have never been in any way connected with Gerald Gardner. In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that the old Craft has survived in fragments all over the British Isles. Naturally, these different groups, which have lost touch with each other over the centuries of persecution, have to a certain extent grown apart. Each has its own version of the tradition, in its own words; and each has its own ideas of practice and ritual. It is proving a tremendously exciting project, to compare these different fragments of tradition, and see wherein they complement each other, and wherein they differ.

I feel that the proposed Witchcraft Research Association could do something really important and worth while in this work, for the future of occultism in Britain. What we need now, more than anything, is for people of spiritual vision to combine together—not that all may think alike, by any means; but that people of different ideas may be more tolerant, one of another, than they have always been in the past.

You know, if only people in the occult world devoted as much time and energy to positive, constructive work as they do to denouncing and denigrating each other, their spiritual contribution to the world would be enormous!

I feel that we have a right to say this, because witches have suffered centuries of intolerance and denigration. It says a good deal for the strength of our Inner Plane contacts that we have survived at all.

I think we have earned the right to proclaim the old teaching of tolerance and freedom, and mutual respect, which is contained in the saying called the Wiccan Rede. "Wiccan" is the Anglo-Saxon plural of "wicce"; and "Rede" means counsel or teaching:

Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfil:

An' it harm none, do what ye will.

This is a simple, positive moral code:

and it could make the world a much happier place.

The best answer to attacks upon Witchcraft is for all of us, whatever branch of the Craft we belong to, to stand together, to be united in a common constructive purpose. We do not all have the same way of doing things; but then, covens never did. The old idea was that each coven was self-governing, within a broad unity of tradition. The leaders of the different covens kept in touch, as far as they could, and helped each other. No one tried to seize power, and each respected the other's ideas, when they were sincerely held. This is the true old Craft tradition.

We have heard a lot about so-called splits in the Craft. Well, we have certainly had differences of opinion, like any other live body of people; and we shall be remarkably lucky if we never have any more!

But I hope this gathering tonight will agree with me, when I say that the things which unite us are very much bigger and more important than the things which divide us; and that our brotherhood in the Craft means far more to us than any personal differences. If we can realise that, and take it into our hearts, then there won't be any splits in the Craft that matter a damn!

And if that message can go out from this meeting tonight, then may the blessing of the Ancient Ones indeed be with us, so that we may end with the Craft's traditional greeting—"Merry meet, merry part".

AUTHOR'S QUERY

Miss Justine C. Glass writes to *Pentagram* as follows:

"I have been asked to write a book on Witchcraft as it is today by a well-known publisher. The purpose of this letter is to ask for the help of those in the Craft who might like to co-operate in what could be called a step towards its 'rehabilitation' in the public mind. By help, I mean the giving of any information possible without violation of its codes.

"Witchcraft claims to be the old religion, and that is one of the aspects with which I want to deal. Today orthodox religion has little or nothing to give, which may be a reason for the general 'dis-ease' of our times. What does Witchcraft offer? Has it an answer to human problems—or to some of them? Can it open the way to fuller experience and a sense of purpose? These are some of the questions which could be a basis for objective consideration of the place of the Craft in the world today. There is growing, intelligent interest in things spiritual—or perhaps one should say supra-physical—and an urgent inquiry into their nature. I think you will agree that as regards

Witchcraft it is time that this inquiry was answered in a constructive way, without either superstitious nonsense or on a basis of equally ignorant disbelief.

"I know as much about the background of Witchcraft as one can discover from the usual sources—such as Dr. Margaret Murray's books. I have studied extra-sensory perception for some years, and written about it in the column which I had on the *Daily Sketch* (where I reviewed some of Professor J. P. Rhine's books), and in *Prediction*, and I am a member of the Huna Research Association. But what I want to do is to present an acceptable picture of the living tradition of Witchcraft, which I cannot do without the co-operation of members of the Craft. I need not say that I would be deeply grateful for such co-operation and that no names or clues as to the source of information would be given. Where possible I would like to arrange a personal meeting. Letters should be addressed to me c/o *Pentagram*."

—JUSTINE C. GLASS.

BOOK REVIEW

THE WORLD OF THE WITCHES:

Julio Caro Baroja (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 36s.).

This latest addition to the publishers' "Nature of Human Society Series" continues their aim to produce important original works of social Anthropology, Sociology and Social Thought and to present the ideas of contemporary social scientists to the non-specialist public.

The author, a member of the Spanish Academy of History, deals largely with the Basque country but also ranges over other parts of Europe in his scholarly survey. The social, psychological and political aspects of Witchcraft are covered in a new and thoroughly fascinating manner which will ensure a lasting demand for this important book.

An introductory chapter entitled "A primary conception of the nature of the world and of existence" adequately sets the stage for the general reader with a useful ten pages describing early attitudes to sky, sun, moon and earth; the moon and its sphere of influence; magical thought; the conception of man and the world.

Many reports of Continental witch-trials are included, and consideration is given to subjects such as the Devil's part, possession, Witchcraft in art and literature, modern views and interpretations. Eighteen illustrations on art paper are included.

Your local bookshop should be able to obtain the book for you or, as a service to readers, it can be ordered through *Pentagram* (which will arrange for copies to be sent direct from the publishers) at 37s. post paid.

THE CRAFT TODAY

Robert Cochrane, descendant of an hereditary Witch family, suggests that radical rethinking is necessary for the craft to assume its rightful place in modern society

Witchcraft, according to those who are modern witches, is the Craft of the Wise. A simple pagan belief, full of old traditions which are appealing, simple virtues, and—if we are to believe their detractors—some ancient vices. According to further information it is a traditional religion based upon an exceedingly simplified concept of the works of Nature. It is by inference from their rituals as reported, an attempt to bribe Nature by various actions and beliefs into a malleable state, so that Nature will function according to the needs of the coven, and what the coven believes to be good for society in general, rather than Nature carrying on in her own sweet way. If we are to believe various interviews carried out by television and newspapers, this has an effect not upon Nature but upon the witch, since there is a report of a witch who claimed that she believed the sun would not rise again if she did not undertake her rituals.

The interesting facet to be gained from such blazes of publicity is that it would appear the Craft has rapidly become an escape hatch for all those who wish to return to a more simple form of life and escape from the ever-increasing burden of contemporary society. In many cases the Craft has become a funkhole, in which those who have not been successful in solving various personal problems hide, while the storm of technology, H-bombs, and all the other goodies of civilisation pass by harmlessly overhead.

Modern Witchcraft could be described as an attempt by twentieth-century man to deny the responsibilities of the twentieth century. It is a secure and naïve belief that Nature is always good and kind. It is also a belief, or so it would appear, that if you personally can go backwards in the evolution of thought, then perhaps the rest of the world might follow suit. Good enough, the Craft is all things to all men, if it is a simple pantheistic belief to those who think it so, so it has become, since the Mysteries were evolved for all men, and Man was evolved for the Mysteries. Which of necessity leads one to ask what the Mysteries are.

All mystical thought is based upon one major premise: the realisation of truth as opposed to illusion. The student of the Mysteries is essentially a searcher after truth, or as the ancient traditions described it, "Wisdom". Magic is only

a by-product of the search for truth, and holds an inferior position to truth. Magic, that is the development of total will, is a product of the Soul in its search for ultimate knowledge. It is an afterthought upon a much larger issue, the ability to use a force that has been perceived while searching for a more important aim within the self. No genuine esoteric truth can be written down or put within an intellectual framework of thought. The truths involved are to be participated in during comprehension of the soul. Truth of this degree is not subject to empirical thought and is only apparent to the eye of the beholder, and to those who have followed a similar path of perception. Throughout the history of humanity there have been myths, schools of wisdom and teachers who have shown a way to attain a working knowledge of esoteric thought and philosophy by using inference rather than direct method to teach the approaches to cosmic truth. The secrecy of these Masters has nothing to do with protecting the Mysteries, since all that can be said about the Mysteries has already been written into folklore, myth and legend. What is not forthcoming is the explanation. It was recognised that these legends, rituals and myths were the roads through many layers of consciousness to the area of the mind where the soul can exist in its totality. These and their surrounding disciplines and teachings became what the West describes as the Mysteries. The Mysteries are, in essence, means by which man may perceive his own inherent divinity.

During the persecution the adherents of the Mystery system went underground and joined forces with the original beliefs of the mass, and so became part of traditional Witchcraft. Centuries passed and the meaning behind much ritual was forgotten, or relegated to a superstitious observance to elemental Nature. Much of the old ritual that has survived became ossified and repeated by rote, rather than by understanding. Consequently it has become static and remote

from its original purpose, which was to enlighten the follower spiritually. In what generally passes as Witchcraft today there is as much illusion and unresolved desire as there is in the outside world. In the closed circles of some covens there is greater bigotry and dogma than there is in many sections of the moribund Christian church. Many witches appear to have turned their backs upon the reality of the outside world and have been content to follow, parrot-fashion, rituals and beliefs that they know have little or no relationship with the twentieth century and its needs. There has been no cause for a fertility religion in Europe since the advent of the coultershare plough in the thirteenth century, the discovery of haymaking, selective breeding of animals, etc. To claim, as some witches do, that there is a greater need in the world for fertility of mind than before is understating general facts, since Western Europe morally and socially has advanced more without the Old Craft and its attendant superstitions than it ever did with them.

The value of the Old Craft today is that in it lie the seeds of the Old Mystery tradition. Through this the witch may perceive the beginnings of that ultimate in wisdom, knowledge of themselves and of their motives. The genuine Mysteries are open to all, because anyone having experience enough can understand that basic Message. To close the human mind in order to protect it from outside circumstances that are hostile, is not a way to discover that within oneself which is most profound, but a return to a claustrophobic mother who will eventually smother the child. If, as is claimed, the Gods are kind and They are *all things*, then why does the twentieth century witch run so rapidly away from them in the practice of the "age old Craft"? In fossilised superstitious tradition there are profound secrets hidden, secrets folded within the most mediocre belief and action. These great secrets, secrets of the soul and of destiny, are only apparent in the open light, not in the illusionary world of Ye Olde English Wiccen. If the witches are to survive then the religion must undergo some violent and radical changes. Changes that will open the ritual for examination, so that the spiritual content may be clearly seen. Changes that must kick over many sacred cows to see whether these old cows still give milk.

The inherent philosophy of the Craft was always fluid, and fluid it must become again before it gasps its last breath under a heap of musty nonsense, half-baked theology and philosophy. Witches cannot retreat from the world any longer, there is no room for us in this society unless we have something valid to offer it, and participate in its social evolution.

PENTAGRAM

All enquiries should be addressed to
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